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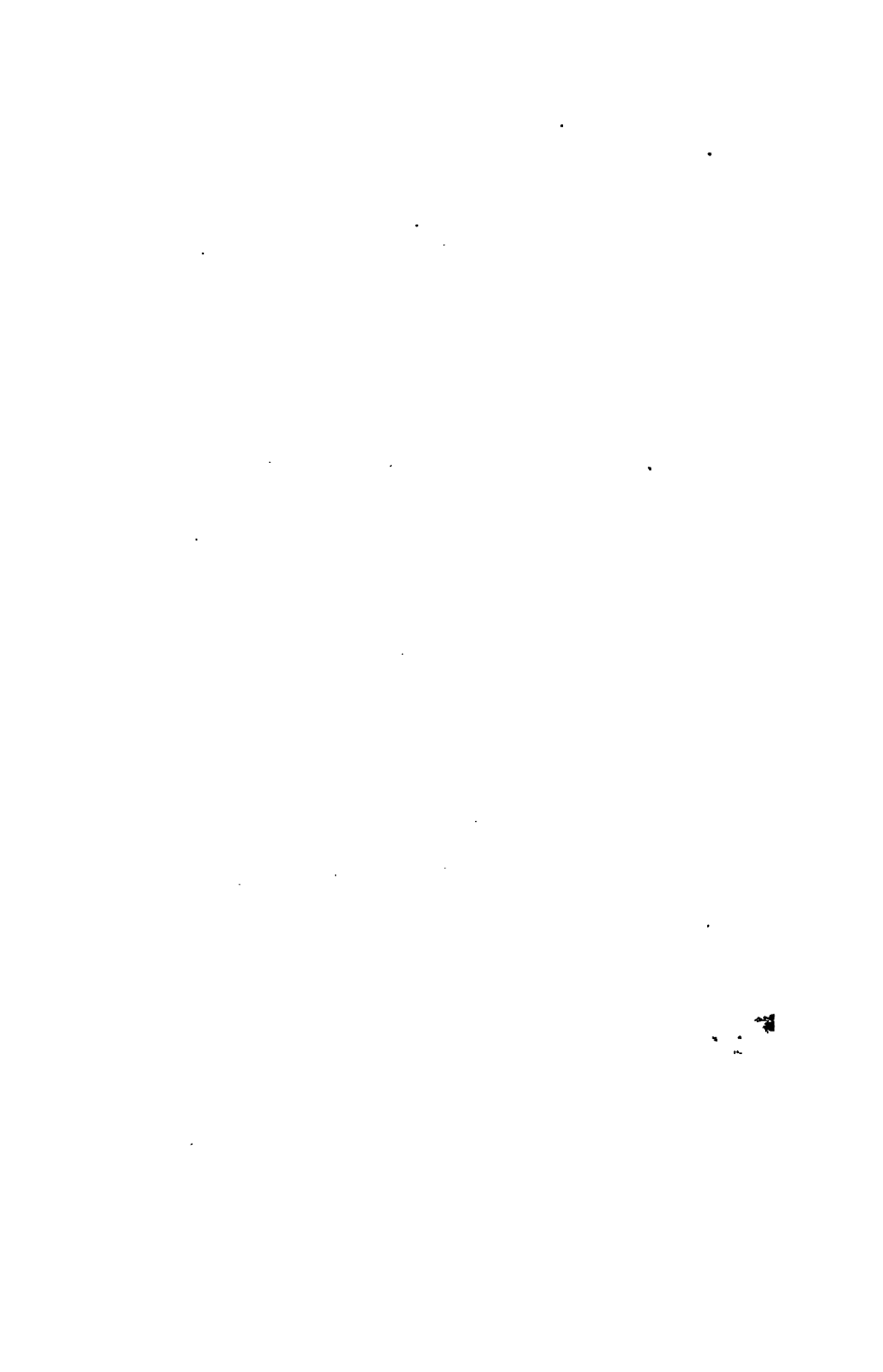
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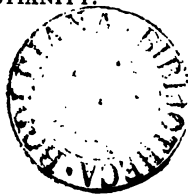




THE INFIDEL'S OWN BOOK :

A STATEMENT

OF SOME OF THE ABSURDITIES RESULTING FROM
THE REJECTION OF CHRISTIANITY.



BY

RICHARD TREFFRY, JUN.

οἱ δι' ὀλίγοντες τὸν κῶλυπα, τὴν δὲ κάμηλον καταπίνοντες.

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347.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It has been the object of the writer of the following pages, to state, in a popular style, some of those irrational conclusions, which a rejection of the Scriptures unavoidably involves. With the ample aids, supplied by a succession of writers on the Christian evidences, whose works, in perspicuity and conclusiveness, are excelled by none in the whole range of English literature, his undertaking was not formidable. The principal difficulty lay in selection; and how far he has succeeded, it is rather for others than himself to decide. It is scarcely needful to add, that the following arguments are not designed for those who read much and think deeply, but for such as either have not access to more elaborate works, or leisure to pursue their subjects at length. To

persons of this class, it is hoped, this little treatise may not be without benefit. The identity of contemporary infidel arguments, in all essentials, with those of former ages, will perhaps be admitted, as an adequate apology for its want of originality, in the proper sense of the term. The objections now raised against Christianity, are substantially what have before been repeatedly advanced, and as often answered. It is sufficient therefore to give another form to arguments, which, though they may have been already urged—have never been confuted.

Penzance, Nov. 1833.

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CHAPTER I.

STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT.

To an unsophisticated mind, the Infidel's want of success in his attempts at proselytism, is a strong proof of the truth of Christianity.—The prevalence of Christianity not to be accounted for by the alleged prejudice and bigotry of mankind—nor by the arts of priests—nor by questioning the soundness of the common sense of men in general.—It cannot be rendered probable that Christianity is untrue.—The Christian therefore can only be induced to abandon it by the offer of something more valuable.—Many Infidels desire no substitute for Christianity—but Christians have a right to demand a substitute.—The specific object of the Infidel's assault is our faith in Christ.—Infidels only united in their rejection of the Bible.—Infidelity variable and uncertain, both in argument and morals—and, in our own times, peculiarly objectionable—therefore, now particularly, no equivalent for our faith.—The alleged absurdities of Christianity no argument against it, so long as the rejection of it involves greater absurdities.—The allegations of Infidels as to the irrationality of the Bible illustrated.—The essential and universal absurdity of Infidelity.—Summary of the argument.

SUPPOSE a native of one of the islands in the pacific ocean, of great natural acuteness, and considerable mental cultivation, though but partially instructed in Christianity, to meet, for the first time, with an infidel.—Imagine that he had never been told, that any inhabitant of a civilized coun-

try, doubted the authority of Christianity.—His first emotion would most likely be surprise. He would next manifest some desire to be more fully informed on the sentiments of his new acquaintance. When the unbeliever had stated his opinions of the Bible and the Christian faith at length, if he were a man of perfect candour, it is not unnatural to suppose that some such conversation as the following might ensue.—

These opinions are new to me. Did you ever mention them to any one before?

Oh dear yes; all my friends are well acquainted with my sentiments.

You must then, I suppose, be considered a very singular person.

By no means: there are very many others, who, though they may not quite agree with me on smaller matters connected with the subject, are yet unanimous in considering the Bible untrue.

But were there any of the like opinions in former times?

Yes; in almost every age, there have been those who rejected Christianity.

And have these been generally thought wise men?

Certainly. Some of them were poets, some politicians, some philosophers,—men remarkable for their natural sagacity, and justly eminent in the arts or sciences which they severally studied.

And they did not keep their opinions secret?

Not at all. Many of them wrote books on the

subject, which have been esteemed as highly logical and conclusive.

Of course, then, you consider yourselves able to prove the falsehood of the Christian religion.

Undoubtedly.

Then our missionaries have not told us the truth. They led us to believe that there were very many Christians in England; but it is not possible that any great number of persons can be found so silly, as to profess a religion, the falsehood of which they may all so readily detect.

Why no, I must do your teachers the justice to say, that upon this subject, they have not deceived you. Notwithstanding all the efforts which have been made by the more enlightened of my countrymen, it must be admitted, that by far the larger proportion of the inhabitants of England, profess to give the most entire credence to the doctrines of the Bible.

Then they must be hypocrites. I cannot come to any other conclusion.

No, I cannot think so either. It is true, that it is not unusual for us to suspect the priests of hypocrisy, and many of the writers on infidelity are fond of urging this accusation against them. But for my own part, I cannot unite in any such sweeping censure. There are, without doubt, wicked and hypocritical priests, and perhaps the greater number of them are of this character; but I dare not deny that there are some so exemplarily virtuous, that it would be malicious to question

their sincerity. At the same time, even these are probably prevented from discerning the weakness of their cause, by a want of impartiality.

Then they must be very foolish men.

Even that I cannot admit. Some of them are undoubtedly men of powerful talent and great learning.

There must be many other persons, however, who have no interest in supporting a system of religion which is demonstrated to be false.

Of course; but these are, for the most part, prevented from embracing the truth by the prejudices of education.

Then we have been much deceived in our opinion of the English. Those whom we have seen, appeared to be very quick in acquiring knowledge: but from your account, it seems that your countrymen in general are so stupid, as to hold fast opinions which, in every age, and by men of the greatest sagacity, have been proved untrue. But let me inquire whether they are so very silly on all subjects?

Not at all. They are probably the most intelligent people in the world, and every following century finds them more fully informed.

Yet, if I understand you aright, they have been under the influence of the same prejudices for many ages.

Oh no: I repeat it, they are incalculably improved in every sort of knowledge; and, religion apart, there is perhaps no nation whose opinions,

during the last two centuries, have been more fully changed.

Yet still Christianity must be on the decline ?

I cannot say that it is. There are more places of Christian worship built, than at any former period in the history of the country. There is more money subscribed for extending Christianity, and there are a far larger number of Bibles in circulation. These I fear can hardly be considered the symptoms of a declining cause.

Then you and your friends, I suppose, cannot be very diligent in putting forth the evidences of the falsehood of the Bible.

Indeed we are. There never was a time in which so many infidel books were distributed among the people ; yet somehow falsehood still prevails, and the influence of the truth, though I hope it is extending, is yet comparatively small.

You must now, however, I conclude, be understood to speak of the least instructed class of society. It cannot be, that the wisest of the English nation have been, and still are, thus deluded.

I am sorry to say that, even here, you are mistaken ; for though there are, without question, many distinguished philosophers who have unhesitatingly denied the truth of Christianity, yet the other side has produced equally great men ; indeed, I fear I should not be mistaken, if I said even greater men.

Those persons, however, who have renounced

Christianity, have, without doubt, studied the subject more deeply than any others.

They have given it some attention, I dare say ; but to be candid, the most learned and talented believers in the Bible, have devoted to its consideration much time and labour. The three greatest philosophers that England ever produced, were men who studied Christianity deeply, and believed it cordially.

Then I must say, that though I hope you would not tell me a lie, yet I can give no sort of credit to your assertion, that you have succeeded in demonstrating the falseness of the Christian religion ; since it is impossible that any person of integrity and intelligence could continue to believe what has been satisfactorily proved to be untrue. And if the philosophers of your party, who have exerted themselves to the utmost, have not been able to persuade the best informed people of England, generally, of the truth of their opinions, those opinions are certainly *not* true, and the Christian religion is therefore fully worthy of our faith and obedience.—

This is the only conclusion, to which we can suppose that an unsophisticated mind could arrive. There is something at once absurd and melancholy, in the pertinacity with which the unbeliever maintains that to be false, which, spite of all his efforts, mankind persist in upholding as true,—which ages of opposition cannot render

suspected, and which, the more fully and impartially it is examined, becomes more perfectly impressive, and more deeply interesting.

Let us not be answered by sarcasms, as to the prejudice and bigotry of mankind; since it is well known, that among the believers in Christianity, are to be ranked some of the most acute and liberal spirits of every age; and since it is equally obvious, that the temper of the multitude would not lead to the permanence of any system, merely on the ground of its antiquity. No topic is more trite than the fluctuating character of popular opinion; yet in direct contradiction to this well known disposition, the infidel would have us believe, that the mass of our population continue to uphold a system of falsehood, out of wilful blindness or sheer obstinacy. And have they thus adhered to vulgar errors generally? How then does it happen, that science has made such rapid advances? How is it that new discoveries are hailed with such pleasure, and investigated with such patience and delight? By what means is it to be accounted for, that we have now no advocates of the opinions of the sixteenth century, on optics, astronomy, and chymistry? On every other subject, men are reasonable; on this, the infidel would persuade us, they are insane.

Let us not here be met with any sneers about the avarice of parsons, and the tricks of priest-craft. We live rather too late in the history of the world, to be held in error of the most mon-

strous kind, merely for the advantage of a very small proportion of our fellow men. For could imposition be extensively and permanently practised in ordinary matters, (which we cannot allow,) yet, where a system imposes restraints, and demands sacrifices, men of any degree of intelligence, are sufficiently perspicacious as to its authority and claims. The unbeliever, who refers the general and permanent acceptance of Christianity to the arts of priests, in effect affirms, that for the profit of one person in five hundred, the other four hundred and ninety-nine blindly subject their understandings to what they may readily ascertain to be an imposition; and that, for the same object, they are willing to sacrifice both property and personal convenience.

Nor are we to be told, that the common sense of mankind is not to be trusted. Where is the fraud which, in modern times, has escaped detection? Take but one fact. Some years since, an attempt was made at one of the London theatres, to palm upon the public, a modern drama, as a newly discovered play of Shakspeare. The forgery was at once detected. It was with great difficulty that the representation proceeded; and at the conclusion, the piece was for ever withdrawn from the stage. In this instance, there was no special pleading employed to produce such a result. No long controversy had rendered the audience familiar with arguments on both sides of the question; but they nevertheless

immediately decided upon the subject, and their verdict was admitted to be sound. On the question of the truth or falsehood of the Bible, the world has long been in possession of perhaps the strongest arguments which each party can command; and the decision of the majority, in every age has been in favour of Christianity. Against this decision the unbeliever clamorously appeals. On all subjects, on which the judgments of men are liable to be warped by ill regulated passions, he nevertheless admits their general concurrence as perfectly satisfactory: but on this, where their decision is in opposition to some of the most powerful human passions, and consequently less to be suspected than in any other case, he scornfully questions their competency, and refuses to abide by their determination.

Such, then, is the present state of the controversy on the evidences of Christianity. Whether the truth of the Bible be certified to the highest degree which the nature of the case will admit, we shall inquire in the sequel. This, at least, the foregoing remarks sufficiently evince, that its falsehood has never been rendered probable, much less has it ever been proved. Were this latter possible, all controversy on the subject had long since terminated, since no one can question either the sincerity or the skill of its assailants. Among the ignorant, and superstitious, and interested, it might still, perhaps, have its votaries, unless indeed where it required sacrifice, and patient en-

duration, and religious resolution ; but among the noble in intellect, and the ingenuous in virtue, it would, by necessity, be a thing only to be scorned and abhorred.

Can any thing, then, be more absurd, than the proposal that we should abandon our faith ? The only plan which the infidel can adopt, with the slightest semblance of rationality, or the smallest probability of success, is to offer something in its stead, either really or apparently more desirable. Of the converts to infidelity, it would be difficult to find any, who have not been rendered such by this means. The majority have forsaken Christianity, with the hope of freedom from its unwelcome restraints, and have become sceptics, only because they were before sensualists. A few others there are, who have not had sufficient humility to submit themselves to the yoke of evangelical faith ; and have followed, into the regions of infidelity, that faithless light of an uplifted imagination,

“ Which leads to bewilder, and dazzles to blind.”

In these two classes, will probably be included all who have been seduced from the ranks of Christian profession.

To the proud and vicious, infidelity is certainly more inviting than Christianity ; but to the humble inquirer after truth, who desires to please God, and who does not esteem the restrictions of Christian morals too severe, either for his own

peace or for the advantage of society, it is sufficiently manifest that neither the promise of unbounded speculation on the one hand, nor of licensed profligacy on the other, can be at all attractive. These are, in fact, among his strongest reasons for rejecting infidelity. Men of themselves, he argues, are far too prone to sensual indulgence, maugre every restraint, both natural and conventional; and whatever cherishes pride and contempt of instruction, must be a hindrance to the progress of truth, since it at once blinds the eyes and indurates the heart. If therefore, in his attempt at proselytism, the infidel sincerely wishes to succeed, where success would be indeed honour,—with those whom the Christian church is happy to acknowledge as its proper members, and its true adornments,—let him not breathe a whisper of that which, to some, is the strongest recommendation of infidelity; but let him seriously set himself to devise something really better than the religion which he so zealously decries.

This, of course, the slothful will not attempt; and there are very many, who having found what they esteem a plausible pretext for discarding the Bible, have attained the highest object of their desires, and care not for any substitute. They have absolutely nothing to offer, instead of what they themselves are compelled to acknowledge, the most splendid dream ever cherished by a fascinated but erring heart. They labour to make

proselytes, by the means but too successfully employed for their own conversion. They abound in the puerile artillery of stale witticisms,—sarcasms which, weak and loathsome enough originally, have dribbled through successive generations of freethinkers, increasing in imbecility and foulness, by each successive transmission.

With such adversaries we do not contend; but to those who demand the terms on which we will cede our faith, we reply:—You cannot render it probable that Christianity is untrue; yet you impugn our views of the character of God, and our belief as to the way of salvation, and the glories of immortality: from you then we have ample right to demand something superior. You object to the reasoning by which Christianity is supported; we call therefore for unquestionable argument to substantiate your theories. You despise the love of the gospel: we ask for a worthier love. You would have us give up our hope of heaven, and renounce what you call the visionary prospects which the Bible supplies: shew us then more secure and more satisfactory enjoyments. This you must do before you can expect us to obey your bidding. But if you decline this mode of settling the controversy; if you call on us to repudiate doctrines, the authority of which cannot be rendered suspicious, and to plunge into absurdities far more serious than those of which you accuse the scriptures; if you would have us give up what we hold most dear, to vacillate between contending

and contradictory systems, and put to sea without helm, or chart, or compass, where neither sun nor stars appear; if, in short, yourselves being judges, you have no equivalent to offer us for our Bibles, you must not be angry with us, nor deem us irrational, if we still remain in the nonage of Christian faith, and still cheat our spirits with the phantasies of scriptural hope. We cannot desolate our hearts: we will not sin against reason, conscience, and self-interest; and as a reply to all your persuasions, we employ the words of a conscience-smitten infidel, who had prepared to burn the Bible;—"we will not destroy this book, till we get a better."

Thus far we act on a principle universally recognized.—He who cannot prove a system of doctrine untrue, has no right to require another to abandon it, unless he substitute something more plausible. Such a requisition, and a compliance with it, are alike irrational. This rule can never be departed from without inconvenience and discredit; but the impropriety is, in some cases, not very important, nor productive of any considerable injury. In the question before us, however, no sort of laxity can be allowed. The highest conceivable interests of this world are matters of no moment, compared to the results of our present inquiry. We argue on the destinies of eternity; and the truth or falsehood of Christianity involves the condition of millions of immortal souls. Here no rigidity can be too inflex-

ible, no gravity too severe. Mistakes on other subjects may be repaired; but if we err on this, we are undone for ever.

And here we cannot but remark, that the specific object of the infidel's assault, is our faith in Christ. He well knows, that till this is destroyed, all his labour is vain; and when he has succeeded here, the fear and love of God, obedience to his laws, and the hope of heaven, will speedily follow. Christ is our refuge from the torments of a guilty conscience, the sense of the just wrath of God, and the apprehension of consequent misery in a future world. Infidelity, to be at all successful, must rob us of our only ground of peace and hope; and this is its design. But if it convince us that we have no Saviour, can it assure us that we are not sinners? If it obscure our views of the mercy of God, can it mitigate his justice? If it take away the comforts of his favour, can it hide us from the terrors of his frown? If it scatter our hopes of heaven, can it for ever quench the hell of a guilty conscience within? It may stupify our moral sense, and we may learn to regard sin as a trivial matter. It may deaden our conscience, and we may generally be free from any considerable concern about our vices. It may ridicule the notion of future punishment, till we cease to esteem hell any thing but the bugbear of priests' tales. It may descant on God's indulgence to human passion, till we forget his purity and justice. But God is still just; we are still

sinner, and justice must ever remain in hostility against sin. The facts are not altered by our want of discernment. The stupefaction of a wretch tottering to the gallows, is no recommendation of the crime which placed him there. Indeed, however much we may labour to disguise the truth from our own hearts, there will be moments in which conscience will speak out, and ultimately, truth will triumph over every obstacle. The most cheering part of Christianity, infidelity takes away for ever: its most terrible truths it cannot destroy, nor even suppress, except for a short time. Spite of all his efforts, there are relics of what he once believed, in the heart of every apostate from Christianity; and he has to maintain a perpetual struggle against knowledge, which if allowed its due influence over his heart, would prove hell to be no fable.

From the infidel therefore, we have a right to demand a system fraught with infinite advantage; since he not only requires us to abandon all the delights which our faith supplies, but leaves us encumbered with a tremendous balance of incalculable and unmitigated evil. Where then is this system? It is sufficiently notorious that among unbelievers of the more reputable order, as well as those to whom we have already alluded, the only bond of union,—if I may so express myself,—is negative. They all reject the Bible; and this alone gives them a distinctive character, and a common interest. There are different classes

of sceptics, admirers or followers of the several master spirits who have, at different periods, addressed themselves to the destruction of the Christian religion; but the leader of each is the founder of a school, not of moralists, but of infidels. He is not admired because of the excellence of the substitute for Christianity which he offers to the world, but on account of the specific character of the assault which he makes on the Bible. Those sceptics who have attempted to promulgate systems of ethics designed to supersede the obnoxious faith, have been, of all others, the least popular; and in the present age, are probably better known to the theological student, by the writings of their opponents, than to their successors in unbelief, by their own works. It would be absurd, therefore, to expect *us* to drag out of their obscure nooks, and to wipe away the accumulated dust and cobwebs of ages, from writings which are forgotten by those whose opinions are most germane to their own. It would be unreasonable to call upon us, painfully to extract from a dull and antiquated style, ethical crudities, to supplant in our hearts the permanently glowing, the vivid and vivifying truths of our own most precious Bibles; especially when no modern infidel thinks such an attempt worth his own labour. As well expect a monarch to toil among the rubbish of a quarry, in search of worthless and neglected crystals, when on his brow, his own diadem flashes with the lustre of inestimable gems.

But suppose we were to shew our sincerity in the inquiry after truth, by doing what modern scepticism is too slothful or too politick to do:—suppose we were to convene a synod of infidels, and to submit to them the obsolete acts and opinions of their fathers, digested, by our own labour, into something like consistency,—should we find even the semblance of unanimity among the successors of the Spinozas and Herberts? It would be too much to expect it. As in former ages, so in our own times, it would be manifest, that infidels must ever be eccentric and wandering, having nothing in common but their departure from the pole star of scriptural truth and purity.

Or to go even farther:—suppose the sceptics of this age to come to one mind, on the question of a substitute for Christianity:—suppose this substitute properly drawn up, and published with the understood sanction of all the rejectors of our faith:—suppose its authors seriously to assert its universal preferability:—suppose we were induced to forego our present opinions, and to assume theirs:—have we any sort of assurance, that the next age would not reject such a system, as fully and ignominiously as their predecessors did that of Christianity? We have every reason to believe they would; and some apostate from Christ, might probably live long enough to hear the execration of his new faith, and the popular shout after some more recent invention. How

then, in the deepest bitterness of heart, would he feel the wretchedness of that folly, which exchanged the well-head of Christianity for the crazy cisterns of human invention!

Such indeed, has hitherto been the fate of every project of infidelity; and it is difficult to find one, which has not had its most formidable foes among those who proposed to achieve the same object in a different way. In fact, in not a few instances, the same hand has erected and destroyed. What one page has affirmed, the next has contradicted; and the theory of one chapter has been neutralized by the admissions of another. There are, perhaps, no writings more marked by incongruity than those of infidels;¹ and they might excite our extreme ridicule, were it not so deeply melancholy, to witness the embarrassments of acute intellects, in the labyrinths of their own inventions,—embarrassments, however, which are scarcely to be avoided, when the judgment and the feelings are enlisted on the opposite sides of a question. Infidelity has always been fluctuating; and from the character of the human mind, always must be so. It has no mountain top amidst its waves, on which may rest the ark of man's most precious hopes. Its voyagers are supplied with no anchor to hold their barks in certainty and repose. Its shores are

1. This is sufficiently shewn in Dr. Leland's *View of Deistical Writers*. See also Bp. Horne's *Works*, vol. vi. pp. 366. etc.

covered with wrecks ; and its distance is shrouded in darkness and disquiet ; where no beacon lights its cheering fire, and no haven extends its friendly moles.

Compare infidelity, as it now exists, with what it was in other times. Once it dwelt among the refined, the educated, and the noble ; it arrayed itself in the guise of learning, and debased to its service only cultivated intellects. The poor and ignorant, it was sneeringly said, were left to the teachings of Christ and his apostles. But now it seeks its proselytes in the lowest orders of society : its writings are adapted to the capacities of the people : its schools are nightly opened to admit the wearied artizan : its lecturers embellish it with gross humour and obscene allusions, interspersing their harangues with appropriate politics, and maddening their disciples with the hope, at once of social convulsions, and of freedom from the restraints of obnoxious morality. If there be any age, therefore, in which the claims of infidelity are peculiarly questionable, it is our own ; and if there be any species of unbelief more repugnant than another to the Christian's heart, it is that which is now popular and prevalent. The infidelity of Porphyry and his times was learned : Spinoza and Hobbes were philosophers : Herbert, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke were men, as well of patrician birth and habits, as of literary acquirements ; Voltaire was a prince among wits ; Hume an athlete among metaphy-

sicians, as well as the most charming of historians: but from the infidelity of this age, real wit and learning are as alien as decency and good manners. It is true that we have, even nowadays, an occasional effort at erudition; and hence the marvellous and happy discovery, that the fable of Jesus Christ is only an improved version, by more ingenious dramatists than Æschylus, of the fable of Prometheus; and that the history of Richard Carlisle is its proper modern counterpart!

The distinction therefore, between the believer and the unbeliever, is now more fully marked than probably it ever was before. The chasm which separated the two from the beginning, every recent age has seen become wider; and the most superficial observation on the character of our own times, gives peculiar emphasis to our conclusion from the present argument:—INFIDELITY, IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIANITY; AND NO CHRISTIAN MAN CAN ABJURE HIS FAITH, WITHOUT BEING GUILTY OF THE MOST EGREGIOUS FOLLY.

Nor can this reasoning be evaded by any declamation on, what the infidel is pleased to call, the absurdities of Christianity: for could we, for a moment, admit the truth of such an accusation, still if Christianity possesses any virtue, no matter how small; if it supplies any substantial happiness, however transitory: if it sheds the light of a pure hope on the path of life, though it be but as the glow-worm's "ineffectual fire,"—so far it transcends infidelity. And what is the fact?—

WE stand in a region, where, whatever may be the alleged defects, there are undeniably some objects of beauty, and some splendid prospects. It is endeared to us by the memory of our fathers: it is the home of our childhood, where we have dwelt many happy years in peace and security. It is ennobled by deeds of high heroism and immortal renown: its chivalry have been victorious in a thousand tented fields; and its records are rich with poetry, at once tender and triumphant. This land we are called on to abandon,—and for what? For sterility, desolation, and forgetfulness! And is this a rational exchange?

Nor need we insist even upon this, since in passing over to infidelity, we necessarily, and *ipso facto*, involve ourselves in absurdities, so palpable, monstrous, and inevitable, that all other ridiculous things become flat and trite in the comparison. And if, upon investigation, this be rendered manifest,—as we trust it will in the following pages,—then the infidel must admit, that it is neither foolish nor inconsistent of us, tenaciously to retain our faith, our hope, and our obedience: he must admit, that the Bible is not the thing to be condemned and sneered at, which he, in his recklessness of consequences, has described it: he must admit, that his own arguments, and his own conduct, justly render him liable to the scorn of every sober man; and finally, he must admit, that on the most momentous of all subjects, there

is a moral certainty, that he is wrong and we are right.

We should do ourselves less than justice however, were we not to remark the difference, between the absurdities with which we are charged, and those with which we charge our adversaries. We are ridiculed for holding certain doctrines which, be they true or false, are confessedly of the most mysterious character; such for instance, as the scripture doctrines of the Trinity, the Atonement, &c. Now we very readily confess, that on such subjects, there is much which we do not comprehend; but we believe, that as there is no self-contradiction in the doctrines themselves, such a degree of light might be cast upon them, such new discoveries made to the understanding, such new trains of thought suggested to the reasoning powers, that they might cease to be mysterious, at least in their present degree; and that in short, the only reason why they are so even now, is because we are but babes in mental capacity, and as yet have only entered the vestibule of the great temple of truth. May not, therefore, the charge of absurdity be, with equal force, brought against the believer in gravitation, the plurality of worlds, or any leading subject of modern science?¹ These too have

1. See this subject amply discussed in Seed's Sermon on "Improbabilities not sufficient to invalidate moral certainty:" *Posthumous Works*, p. 25. and in Dr. Gregory's *Letters on the Christian Religion*. Vol. I. p. 60. *et seq.*

their mysteries, and if proposed to a clown, would meet with ridicule quite as sincere, if not quite so elegant, as that lavished by the infidel on Christianity: and yet the capacity of that clown is infinitely nearer the comprehension of such scientific truths, than the ability of the first of men, to the mode of the divine essence, and the character of the divine government. Here, therefore, analogy teaches us, that the charge of absurdity, brought against Christianity on account of such doctrines, is unfounded and ridiculous. They are neither discovered nor demonstrated by human philosophy:—they are matters of pure revelation; and are therefore to be believed, even if for ever incomprehensible to the most perfect and cultivated of created minds.

The other class of absurdities of which the Bible is accused, consists of apparent discrepancies in scripture history or chronology, peculiarities of the Jewish law, strong figures, temporary arrangements founded upon ancient or oriental manners, &c., &c.; things which would not for one moment embarrass a liberal critic; which can only be insisted on from the most invidious motive; but which, obviously, can by no means affect the general argument.

But the absurdity of infidelity is no question of doubtful disputation; no accident of which it can divest itself. It is too rank and palpable to admit of any evasion. It meets us at every stage of our progress. It affronts us in the grave sub-

tilty of the metaphysical unbeliever, and in the bare ribaldry of the newly converted mechanic. There is no garb which scepticism can assume, nor any art to which it can resort, which will conceal its essential irrationality. It can address no class of society, nor touch on any topic of discussion without betraying itself. It may be insidious or insolent, doubtful or dogmatical, scholastic or popular, refined or vulgar, but it can never cease to be absurd. It may solicit our passions or our reason, our vices or our judgment, our solitary imaginations or our social habits, but its nature always remains the same. Behold the scenes which its incantations call up, in the enchanted haunts of philosophy, or on the darkened stage of history.—Falsehood, in her party coloured mantle and her painted mask, with superstition, trembling and hoodwinked, pass before our eyes in the broad clear light of heaven, linked with the best forms of science and philosophy, and attended by the fairest virtues by which human nature can be adorned; while around the group is ringing the untrembling music of immortal hope.—On the other hand, the pure beauty of truth smiles on uncleanness, treason, and murder; and is accompanied by the loud shrieks of horror, and the low wailing of despair.¹—Myriads of men are presented to us, who have no single sense in which they can trust. Their eyes see false prodigies; their ears hear imaginary thunders; their

1. See chap. ii.

palates are satisfied by the semblance of food; and visions of running streams dispel their thirst, for many long years, in an arid wilderness. Images of strange reptiles are attended by the fancy of acute pain, and the apparent destruction of thousands, who are yet in perfect health. For these unhappy wretches there is delusion in every element. The sun and moon, the atmosphere and the sea, the lightning and the dust, are all alike pregnant with falsehood; while the cheated beings themselves appear before us with the most perfect faith in all the dreams which distort their perceptions.¹—In another scene of this strange phantasmagoria we behold the most splendid cities falling into ruin, the most extraordinary revolutions both political and moral effected,—monarchs deposed from their thrones, and crowns and sceptres disposed of, like the baubles of children, by a set of vagabond mountebanks.²—Do we seek the most benevolent and heroic of men? Infidelity places before us a race more crafty than serpents, more cruel than tigers, more unfeeling than rocks, more deaf to prudence, shame, and compassion, than the raging sea,—banded to accomplish the maddest of schemes, and by a series of enormities to compel a reluctant world to tranquillity, happiness, hope, and virtue.³

To the illustration of these and similar absurdities, the succeeding pages will be devoted.

1. See chap. iii.—2. See chap. iv.—3. See chap. v.

The practical character of scepticism will first be considered;¹ and then the methods by which unbelievers strive to evade the force of the principal scripture evidences.² We shall next show the conclusions to which infidelity necessarily leads, as to the characters of the authors of the Bible, generally, and the first promulgators of Christianity in particular:³ and lastly, we shall endeavour to prove, that the infidel is responsible to God and man for all the monstrous absurdities which his unbelief involves.⁴

1. See chap. ii.—2. See chap. iii. and iv.—3. See chap. v.—

4. See chap. vi.

CHAPTER II.

PRACTICAL CHARACTER OF INFIDELITY.

Christianity is a remedy for all the moral evils which afflict mankind—and therefore should be universally welcomed.—The treatment which it has received from Infidels.—Infidel morals illustrated.—The revolution of France.—Corollaries.—The opinions of Infidels on the subject of natural religion, contradictory and perplexing.—Natural religion powerless, and therefore mischievous—and without adaptation to any of those circumstances in which men peculiarly need the aids of religion.—The practical efficiency of Christianity.—Conclusion.—NOTES—A. Testimonies to the value of Christianity.—B. The religion of ancient heathens.—C. Anecdote of Mr. Hume.

NOTHING can be more manifest, than that there are propensities and habits of the human mind, which materially diminish both personal comfort and social security. Envy, hatred, revenge, covetousness, falsehood, and intemperance, for example, are undoubtedly hurtful to the individual who is under their influence; and yet, in at least the majority of mankind, there is a strong tendency to these or similar evils. The principal source of man's misery is his own moral corruption; and even the disquiet arising from events over which he appears to have no control,

may be sensibly diminished, if not entirely removed, by the influence of certain moral causes, with the operation of which, we are all of us, either by experience or observation, more or less familiar.

All human laws are founded on the supposition that men need restraint; and it is a melancholy consideration, that however severe their penalties, they are yet inadequate to the end proposed,—an indication but too plain of the strength of depraved appetites. The greater part of the moral evils which afflict individuals and society however, are beyond the cognizance of human legislators; especially those indulgences of secret passion, which are most fruitful causes of personal disquietude and social insecurity. There are also persons whom law cannot reach, and they often become fearful scourges of society, by the unchecked play of their naturally corrupt propensities. Now if something could be devised, which would restrain, chasten, and direct the passions of men, and at the same time supply such moral principle and motive as could not be affected by the vicissitudes of fortune,—

“ Quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens
Possit diruere, aut innumerabilis
Annorum series, et fuga temporum,”—1

a rational method of happiness would thus be afforded to the whole of the human race.

1. HOR.—*Car. liii. od. xxx.*

Which mocks the powerless tempest's rage,
And swells immortal o'er the wrecks of age.

Suppose such a system to have been discovered,—a system uniting in itself the most perfect and harmonious theory, with the most manifest practical efficiency; and which should at first have been taught, and afterwards promulgated by men of unquestionable virtue and benevolence. To give full proof of its worth, suppose its agency to have been applied to persons whose characters were most alien from its principles,—the envious, discontented, and selfish;—men personally unhappy, who employed their substance in riotous debauchery, and brought want and misery on their families; who were not to be reclaimed by the entreaties of their wives, or the sorrows of their children; who were held infamous by the more sober part of their neighbours, and who disregarded the obligations, spurned the restraints, and sneered at the penalties of human laws. Suppose the experiment confined to no particular physical temperament, no rank in society, no grade of intellect or measure of culture, to no country or age:—suppose it tried on the savage and the civilized, the melancholick and the sanguine, the slave and the free man, the rich and the poor, the intellectual and the stupid, the young and the aged. Let it have been witnessed by the successive generations of men for a thousand years. Let the result in all cases have been mainly and essentially the same:—suppose such characters as we have just described, to have become contented, honest, and industrious; blessings to

their respective families and neighbourhoods; frugal and temperate in their habits, obedient to the laws of their country, and in all respects fitted for that particular station in society, in which they were called to move. Suppose them to have endured affliction with fortitude, and torture and death with uninterrupted magnanimity.—

Let the influence of such a system have been tried on nations:—suppose its invariable effect to have been the civilization of the barbarous, and the introduction of science, literature, and social cultivation among the untutored. Suppose it to have destroyed all cruel and sanguinary superstitions, and generated a purer form of legislation, and a more equitable administration of justice. Let it have raised up asylums for the destitute and afflicted, made provision for the previously neglected poor, erected seminaries for learning, and established a benign and practical morality for all ranks of society.—

With what delighted approval would all virtuous men regard such a system! Every individual possessing the shadow of a claim to philanthropy, would dispose himself to listen with eagerness to every argument in favour of its authority; he would search out every consideration tending thereto; he would sincerely sorrow at the failure of any attempt to establish it; and if at last, he were compelled to abandon it, as untrue in its principles, and unfounded in its claims, it would

be in sadness and silence. Though himself convinced of its error, he would rejoice to find the arguments unsuccessfully employed in his own case, admitted by the minds of others; and far from wishing to disturb their faith, he would silently envy them the conviction, which he, for himself, could not attain.

On the other hand, what should we think of those persons, who studiously set themselves to invalidate such a system,—some of whom, nevertheless, had not taken the pains even to read the record of it with attention?¹ What would be our opinion of those who exaggerated its apparent difficulties, and laboured to render its peculiarities ridiculous; who again and again resorted to every stratagem of craft, and every art of wit against it; who denounced, with ferocious abuse, the men who propagated or who defended it, and held up them and their disciples to the laughter of the licentious, and the scorn of the malignant? What, I ask, would be, and ought to be, our opinion of the men, and of their principles, who systematically and perseveringly assailed a disinterested attempt to exalt and bless mankind, when the proofs of its efficiency and importance were daily before their eyes? Let the indignant sense of every virtuous man furnish a reply.

Now all this, and far more than this, Chris-

1. Mr. Hume confessed that he had never read the New Testament with attention. From many other infidels, such a confession is not necessary.

tianity has actually effected ; and this, and worse than this, is the treatment which infidels have bestowed upon it. He that denies these results of our faith, is not a man to be argued with. The proofs of its virtue present themselves on every hand, in individual happiness, domestic enjoyment and national exaltation. It is not consistent with our present purpose to go into the ample details of this argument, nor indeed is it needful, since it has been richly and convincingly illustrated, by numerous writers on the Christian evidences.¹ But we turn to our assailants and ask,—What has infidelity done for the happiness of man ? Where are its trophies of purity and excellence ? Into what heart has it ever entered to still the tumult of passion ? into what home, to introduce frugality, industry, and integrity ? On what crusade of mercy have its teachers ever gone ? Where is the barbarous land which they have sought to cultivate ? Where are the universities, or almshouses, or hospitals that owe their existence to the genius of scepticism ? What nation is indebted, for its laws, its arts, its virtue, and its glory, to infidelity ? Let us investigate its right to impugn Christianity. Let us listen to the doctrines, and examine the characters of its professors. We are engaged in a great practical inquiry : we glance, therefore, at the conduct of infidels, not from any invidious desire to criminate them, but because the argument, in its most

1. See Note A, at the conclusion of this chapter.

important form, cannot be otherwise determined.¹

From the frequency with which the accusation of hypocrisy is brought against Christians, it might be naturally concluded, that this vice, at least, never stained the conduct of their infidel accusers. They might be bold, and, perhaps in some cases, indiscreet; they might be vicious, and even depraved; but certainly they would have the credit of being frank and unreserved. Of course, among them, there would be no masking of their real character, no truckling to prevailing usages, and most of all, nothing mercenary. This indeed has often been the boast of the unbeliever. Now what will be said, if it can be shown, that most of the leaders of infidelity, have not only been hypocrites, but have been peculiarly mean and wicked in their hypocrisy? Can any hypocrisy be more base than that, the motive of which is, confessedly, mere secular advantage,—such for instance, as that of Collins, Shaftesbury, Paine, and others, who did not hesitate to partake the sacrament of the Lord's supper, and thus tacitly profess themselves Christians, in order to be qualified for civil offices? Some wretched creatures have gone even farther, and while infidels in the grossest sense of the term, they have become preachers of Christianity, and have actually obtained ecclesiastical preferment.

1. See Note B.

The authorities for the succeeding statements will be found in Leland's *View of Deistical Writers*, Dwight on *Infidelity*, Horne's *Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures*, &c.

Tindal was a hypocrite, according to the times,—protestant, papist, and then protestant again; and an infidel through the whole. Rousseau was the same. Hobbes made a merit to Cromwell, of having turned to his defence, the Leviathan, which was originally written to serve the cause of Charles the first; and this the philosopher did not scruple to confess to Lord Clarendon. Voltaire, while he professed to doubt the existence of God,¹ built a church, and inscribed on it the memorial of his everlasting infamy, in the words, "*Deo erexit Voltaire*," Voltaire built this church for the worship of God. The same person pretended to be a devout catholic, attended mass in the communion of the Romish church, and bowed before the emblem of the sufferings of Christ, while, with his philosophical associates, he was engaged for the destruction of Christianity, and adopted as the motto of his party, the awful sentence, "*Ecrasez l'infame*,"—crush the wretch, meaning Jesus Christ! He says in a letter to one of his associates,—D' Alembert, if my memory be correct,—“Conceal your march from the enemy, but crush the wretch!”

But perhaps the most execrable hypocrisy to be found even among infidels, is that of the men, who profess the utmost reverence for Christianity, in those very writings the object of which is to overthrow it. In this class are to be found Herbert, Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Woolston, Morgan,

1. See the correspondence in the works of the king of Prussia.

Tindal, Chubb, Bolingbroke, and others. Nay, where are the infidel writers of any eminence, who have not applauded Christianity, that they might the more surely destroy it? This accusation cannot be evaded, by saying that they are not aware of the tendency of their works. Many of them are men of sufficiently quick discernment, and their real design is too obvious to be mistaken by persons of even common capacity.¹

“Such faithless professions, such gross violations of truth in Christians, would have been proclaimed to the universe, by these very writers, as infamous desertions of principle and decency. Is it less infamous in themselves? All hypocrisy is detestable; but none is so detestable as that which is coolly written with full premeditation, by a man of talents, assuming the character of a moral and religious instructor, a minister, a prophet of the truth of the infinite God. Truth is a virtue perfectly defined, mathematically clear, and completely understood by all men of common sense. There can be no haltings between uttering truth and falsehood, no doubts, no mistakes; as between piety and enthusiasm, frugality and parsimony, generosity and profusion. Transgression, therefore, is always a known, definitive, deliberate villainy. In the sudden moment of strong temptation, in the hour of unguarded attack, in the flutter and trepidation of unexpected alarm, the best man may, perhaps, be surprised

1. See Note C.

into any sin; but, he who can coolly, and of steady design, and with no unusual impulse, utter falsehood, and vent hypocrisy, is not far from finished depravity.¹”

And is the respect paid by infidels to the rights of property, superior to their regard to the claims of truth? Is it under the wing of scepticism that law and equity are fostered? Does it stretch forth its hand to aid the oppressed, and to repress fraud and injustice? It would be irrational to expect it. Hypocrisy and honesty do not walk hand in hand. Hence the doctrine of Mr. Hobbes is, that every man has a right to all things, and may lawfully get them if he can.² Lord Bolingbroke resolves all morality into self-love. Rousseau, according to his own confessions, was as arrant a knave as any whose memoirs grace the pages of the Newgate calendar. One of the idolaters of Voltaire states, that while on a visit to him, her letters were regularly intercepted and broken open by him, and the woman with whom he lived in adultery; and relates a scene which took place, in consequence of their misconception of a phrase in a letter addressed to her, which for its forgetfulness of all the decencies of society, might rival the most furious abuse of Billingsgate.³ A French infidel, author of a

1. DWIGHT.

2. “Hobbes’s politics are fitted only to promote tyranny, and his ethics to encourage licentiousness.” HUME. *Et tu Brute!*

3. *Vie privée de Voltaire et de Madame du Châtelet, pendant un séjour de six mois à Cirey.* Paris, 1820.

catechism for the human race, affirms that property in land and property in women,—that is marriage,—are the two greatest violations of natural liberty, and the bane of human happiness; ¹—a sentiment, I believe, not uncommon among the monstrous rout of libertine theories, engendered by the French revolution.

One of the highest outrages which can be committed against individual peace, or against the social compact, is adultery. Infidelity, both in its published opinions and its notorious practice, is the patron and encourager of this crime. Bolingbroke and Hume, to say nothing of Voltaire, Helvetius, and Rousseau, are its avowed advocates. “Adultery *must* be practised, if men would obtain all the advantages of life,” is the doctrine of David Hume.² How miserably sordid and brutal must have been the mind which could proclaim so abominable a sentiment! The advantages of life! And in this tone of most heartless flippancy, can infidelity sacrifice domestic peace and conjugal love; snap asunder the most solemn bonds of society, and advocate a treachery too foul and atrocious, to have been contemplated by the basest nations, except with the most determined resentment. Nor is this, it should be remembered, the dogma of a filthy crew of French debauchees, nor of the grossly obscene school of Thomas Paine, but of a sober, decent, and com-

1. Quarterly Review, No. LVI. *Art.* xii.

2. Essays. Vol. ii. p. 409. *Edit.* 1767.

paratively moral sceptic. Would the reader learn how low infidelity is capable of debasing man? one fact will suffice to shew him. A writer in the *Encyclopédie Methodique*, says of the abomination of Sodom, that the Greeks were "*ni moins estimés ni moins estimables*,"—neither less esteemed nor less worthy of esteem for practising it; and the conduct of that unnatural wretch the king of Prussia, proves that this is not a mere theory.

I will not pursue this subject farther: it is too revolting to human nature. Even the Roman satyrast makes chastity a virtue of the golden age:—

"Credo pudicitiam Saturno rege moratam
In teris visam :"—1

And in a degenerate age, there were, he says, "*multa pudicitiae veteris vestigia*,"—many relics of ancient chastity: but the golden age of infidelity would be, when modesty,—which Lord Bolingbroke makes the offspring of vanity alone,—should be banished from the earth; when all the tender charities of husband and wife, father and child, should be unknown; and when fierce and bestial lust should spread its corrupting influence over every region and every heart.

Is the infidel a happy man? Let him deal faithfully with himself, and we do not require

1. JUVENAL, *Sat.* vi.

"In Saturn's reign at nature's early birth,
There was a thing called chastity on earth.

DRYDEN.

him to tell us the result of his investigation. If deism can make him happy, why this perpetual restlessness? why this constant longing for variety? why these outbreaks of discontent and peevishness? why this anxious inquiry of each of the objects which are supposed in any measure capable of affording satisfaction?—

“Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?”

Gay the infidel may be, and thoughtless, and frivolous: he may succeed in stupifying his conscience, and hardening his heart; but while he is under the dominion of unrestricted passion,—and this infidelity does its utmost to promote,—he cannot be at repose.¹ There are, alas, on every hand, but too many shocking illustrations of the misery of infidels. Not to refer to any others, let him who wishes to pursue the subject, which is far too ample for these pages, contemplate the last hours of Voltaire, D’Alembert, and

1. The authoress of “*La Vie privée de Voltaire et de Mde. du Châtelet*,” after having, in the previous part of her work, described the splendour in which they lived, remarks, “Ah my friend, there is no happiness on earth, and we are for ever deceived by appearances. We believed them to be the happiest couple in the world, when we saw them seldom and at a distance, but when one has come close to them, we find, alas, that *hell is every where*.” p. 100. True; “there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked!”

Paine,¹—men who lived just long enough to shew the world the value of the principles which they advocated. How poor and contemptible is that religion,—if religion it may be called,—which cannot make men contented in health and prosperity, and which, when they most need consolation,—in sorrow and death,—cannot even lull the anguish of remorse, much less supply the slightest hope of happiness in a future world! Who would seek or esteem impotence and uncertainty, or horror and despair?

The tendency of infidelity on a grand scale, has been tried once, and once only, in the history of the world. Never but in France, was exhibited the spectacle of a national denunciation, not only of Christianity, but of all religion. Individual atheists there had been before,—men who were dull, and unimaginative, and desperate enough to resolve all order and beauty in the natural world, into casualty, and all love, hope, poetry, reason, and virtue into what, in a few years, will be rottenness and dust,—but never before did a senate convene to decree and announce, that man has no God, no soul, no immortality. The most fastidious of sceptics will admit, that no experiment could commence under more favourable

1. Barruel's *Memoirs of Jacobinism*, Vol. i. c. 17. pp. 377—382. Cheetham's *Life of Paine*, pp. 153—160. The former of these works will afford the reader much interesting information respecting the French revolution. He may also refer to Gifford's *Residence in France* during the years 1792—1795, for further statements on this latter subject.

auspices, or be more fairly tried. And what were the results? He must have stronger nerves, or a more obdurate heart than the generality of mankind, who can contemplate them without an emotion of horror. Royalty, and nobility of birth and manners,—public morals and private decencies,—venerable institutions and domestic happiness,—sunk in ruin before the desolating power of atheistical principles. The most monstrous anarchy was dignified by the name of liberty, the most unnatural cruelty by that of civism.¹ Vulgar profligacy was exalted to a ridiculous worship; the most frightful outrages were sanctified as the rights of man; and the dominion of public terror, social sorrow, and universal insecurity was proclaimed the Age of Reason! It is computed that, in ten years, three millions of human beings fell by the hands of the executioner, or other methods of violent death; and the history of revolutionary France will be, to all succeeding generations of men, a picture of accumulated, intensified, unprecedented vice, shame, and agony! Where is the nation which could desire the repetition of this happily solitary experiment? Nay, where is the knot of crazy theorists, who would hail the meteor star of a second such revolution?

It is probable that there never was a nation, which so suddenly, and from internal causes alone,

1. To consummate the triumph of Atheism over human nature,—after the massacre at Lyons, the convention published a decree FORBIDDING ALL MOURNING, *on pain of death!*

made so rapid a stride towards absolute barbarism. When, under the consular government, a report was made from the various provinces of France, on the subject of education, the commissioners stated, that the youth had been brought up in vicious idleness:—"they are without the idea of a God, without a notion of right or wrong. The barbarous manners which have thus arisen," it is added, "have produced a ferocious people, and we cannot but groan over the evils which threaten the present generation and the future."¹

What then is the issue of our argument? Christianity, we are told, is untrue:—if so, a system of falsehood is the fountain of personal and domestic enjoyment, and of national dignity and excellence. It is therefore the duty of all legislators and moralists to promote the spread of falsehood, in order to maintain the best charities of the human character, and to preserve the well being and proper order of society. The converse, of consequence, will be equally unavoidable from the same premises.—Truth is the source of the most monstrous evils which can afflict individuals or nations,—of all the crimes that render man hateful, wretched, and mischievous. Personal misery, family feuds, general licentiousness, and the disruption of the bonds of society are the consequences of the promulgation of truth. The search after truth is madness, since vice will in-

1. *Analyse des Procès Verbaux*, quoted by Southey in his *History of the Peninsular War*. Vol. i. p. 41.

evitably attend it; and so far as they understand it, it is the wisdom of all legislators and moralists studiously to conceal it; if they would minister to the happiness of the people whom they instruct or govern. In other words, to be correct in opinion, is the sure way to error and misery of life; while to be wrong in opinion, is certainly productive of rectitude and happiness. Is it then too much to say, that infidelity is, by its practical results, proved to be essentially irrational? Whatever in Christianity may have been the subject of ridicule, no such nonsense as the above, can be alleged against it. The scripture teaches that an effect corresponds with its cause; that a bitter fountain does not send forth sweet waters, nor a healthy tree produce corrupt fruit; and thus far at least, it is true to the common sense of all mankind.

And are not the foregoing statements sufficient to prove infidel morality abominable and destructive? We are fools in our faith, but we do not seek our abettors in the recesses of the tavern and the brothel. The wretched artizan, reeling home penniless, to curse his yet more wretched wife and children, asks no brotherhood with us. The bankrupt in reputation and morals, does not refer his ruin to our principles. We may be deemed in error, but the happiness and honour of man are on our side. Smiling homes and individual peace claim the fellowship, and attest the virtue of our religion; and man, in his highest

form of culture and character, is not ashamed of the profession of our faith. Christianity may be denounced as untrue, but she has been the fruitful mother of a fair and flourishing offspring. Peace, purity, and beneficence play around her knees. Poetry, science, freedom, commerce, and law have been nurtured at her breasts, and her glory cannot perish.

Or to put the case in another, though perhaps not stronger form:—all men, except atheists, acknowledge the necessity of some religion: infidels, in general, are the champions of what is called natural religion. Suppose, therefore, the sort of infidelity with which, in this instance, we have to do, and which used to be called deism,—to be identical with natural religion: suppose it were not practically so great an evil as experience proves it; that it gave no encouragement to the corrupt propensities of man's heart; that its professors were generally persons of decent morals, and that an individual were sincerely disposed to embrace it, as a substantial and adequate religious provision,—where would he find its record or its authority? The opinion, that the conscience of each individual must be his own rule and monitor, cannot be entertained for a moment, except on the supposition, that the mind of every man is perfectly enlightened, and that his affections are perfectly pure. Ignorance or moral obliquity would render him utterly unfit to judge for himself; and he must indeed be a stranger to human

nature, who does not know that men in general are, on moral subjects, both ignorant and depraved. Were the fact different, natural religion would be essentially the same in all lands and in all ages. But instead of unanimity, nothing can be more contradictory or perplexing, than the opinions on this question.¹ Must the inquirer after truth go to the Esquimaux Indians, or to the savages of the South Sea islands, or to the Hottentots,—the unsophisticated part of mankind, —to be instructed in natural religion? Or must he make the classical moralists his teachers? or must he range himself with the disciples of Thomas Paine? And by what means is he to satisfy himself of the perfect illumination, and the purity of heart, and the practical authority of the master whom he may choose? Such facts as form the illustrations of the present chapter, do not much encourage us to believe in the impartial love of virtue, so ostentatiously assigned to the doctors of natural religion.

Religion is a provision for this life, and according to some deists, for this life only. But even if we lose sight of the proof that infidelity,—or call it deism if you will,—is productive of the most frightful evils on society as it at present subsists,—is it not most absurd to suppose, that God has left us to the labour of examining a

1. See an ample confession of Rousseau to this effect, quoted by Dr. Gregory in his "*Letters on the Christian Religion*." Vol. i. p. 6. *et seq.* (NOTE.)

multitude of contradictory dogmas, in order to ascertain what is our duty, and how we may most successfully strive to perform it? It requires no small ingenuity to extract any thing like a congruous system from the works of *one* of the favourers of natural religion, how much more to produce harmony between the whole! If the inquirer after truth be poor, or engaged in business, or of uncultivated mind,—however sincere, he will find it little less than the labour of a life, to make himself but partially acquainted with the subject. Meanwhile all the objects for which religion is supposed to be designed, are left neglected. It is no rule of life, no consolation in calamity, no motive to integrity and benevolence. Vicious habits are strengthened; guilt is accumulated, the heart becomes increasingly depraved, and the choicest energies are wasted in frivolous pursuits.

Nor would the difficulties of the case be removed, if that were admitted which we deny, and which the state of mankind at large fully disproves,—that men from their own hearts, may sufficiently understand the will of God. By what means can they acquire the ability to use their knowledge? They cannot, by their unassisted powers, become virtuous and happy, or the world would not abound with vice and wretchedness. It is easy to talk of morality and reformation, but let a man set himself to practise it, and he will soon discover his incapacity. Suppose the case of a person

living in habitual sin ;—say that he has indulged in discontent at his own condition, and envy of that of others, till nothing that he possesses affords him any sort of gratification, and he constantly contemplates the situation of those more wealthy or more exalted than himself with malignancy ;—we allow that it requires no profound investigation to ascertain such a temper to be evil, but how can he rid himself of it ? Does natural religion supply any moral energy, so as to enable him to overcome any such habit of mind ? Certainly not : to all practical purposes it is useless.

And this will be an answer to those, who object to the mode of reasoning pursued in the former part of this chapter. They may urge that it is no argument against natural religion, that some of the rejectors of the Bible have been immoral men. This we readily grant, but this is beside the mark. What we assert is, that infidelity gives unrestricted operation to the corruptions of the human heart ; that this is the direct, intentional, and essential influence of its doctrines ; and we cite in proof, the character of its most eminent champions, in whom beyond all others, we naturally expect to see its legitimate results. And even if infidelity did not boldly avow the lawfulness of covetousness, duplicity, and uncleanness, still its inability to prevent these evils, would be a sufficient argument against it. Whatever keeps man in a state of moral impotency—and this infidelity does,—is the cause of sin in him.

Whatever proposes itself as a sufficient system of religion, and induces any one to receive it as such, if it cannot correct his vices, becomes the most certain means of confirming him in them, since it makes sin appear inevitable, and of consequence not culpable. Every man who relies alone on what infidels call natural religion, as an adequate moral provision, must become increasingly vicious, not only from the absence of every practical corrective, but from the delusive notion that whatever it cannot enable him to avoid, is no more a fault than hunger and thirst.

Were the teachings of infidelity therefore, as pure as they are depraved, it would still be a mischievous, because powerless system. A corpse of perfect symmetry and fair placid complexion,

“Before decay’s defacing fingers,

Have swept the lines where beauty lingers,”—

is as fully and entirely dead, as one which lies putrefying in the grave; and to prefer either to a form filled with life and health, and adorned with animated beauty, is,—in a practical sense,—equally absurd. He who prefers the cold impotent dogmas of natural religion, however pure, to the energetic and vivifying system of Christianity, is practically as irrational, as the avowed advocate of sensuality and uncleanness. Could he therefore succeed in arranging a system of perfect moral symmetry and ethical beauty, it must remain lifeless and profitless, for he cannot call the vital fire from heaven.

There are certain seasons in the life of every man, in which he seems peculiarly to require the aids of religion, and in which,—however careless on the subject in general,—he seeks with a sort of instinct, consolations which cannot be obtained from ordinary sources. Let us suppose the case of a person who has spent a long life in the practice of vice, and who is, by the severe but just sentence of his country's law, condemned to a violent death. While he stands on the margin of life, his conscience which has long slumbered, awakes with a giant's power. The scenes of his past history rise in terrifically vivid array before his memory. He is filled with remorse; and notions of God's justice,—though faint and inadequate,—overwhelm his soul with indescribable anguish.

Now, in such a case, what can natural religion effect? It cannot persuade a sinner, who is infamous among men, condemned by human laws, and tortured by remorse for his past crimes, that he has never done any thing materially wrong. It cannot assure him that God will accept his reformation or repentance. For the one he has no opportunity, and if the other cannot arrest the stroke of human justice, much less can it satisfy the law of God. Repentance is indeed a tacit acknowledgement of his guilt, and of the righteousness of his condemnation. No considerations of God's benevolence will avail him. He is convinced, from the mass of human misery around him, that the Governor of the universe must

possess attributes widely different from that of pure benevolence; and he feels that his own life has been so completely sinful, that if God ever give a palpable expression of his purity and abhorrence of evil, it must be in his case. Every consideration which natural religion can suggest, heightens his certainty that he is, and must remain, the subject of God's just judgment. If there be a system of moral government extended over the universe, it must involve future retribution; and if the virtuous be rewarded, he is convinced that he must be punished. The only consolation therefore which a rejector of the Bible can offer him, is the assurance that God exercises no such government, and that there is no hereafter,—which is practical atheism. Even this dull and wretched opiate to his fears, is often insufficient. He has that within, which refuses to be so lulled. His torment is aggravated by such attempts to remove it; and he dies as he has lived, in depravity, helplessness, and despair.

But were the case invariably otherwise,—were these atheistical doctrines sufficient to quiet the apprehensions of a dying sinner,—let us conceive how they would operate on the mind of a man in circumstances of great temptation. He expects to reap advantage from the commission of some crime; a favourable opportunity is presented, and the probabilities of detection appear very small. He has not, however, quite dismissed the fear of God from his heart, and he hesitates.

But let him only be assured that God does not govern the world, and his scruples are at once dismissed.

Suppose again, the case of a person of exemplary virtue visited by heavy calamity. He peculiarly needs the consolations of religion, and he is worthy of those consolations. But alas, how deeply do such doctrines aggravate his distress! He has long been labouring to please God; and now he is told that his attempts are vain and impertinent. His hope of a state of retribution hereafter, he is assured, is visionary. His self-denial, integrity, and benevolence, he is taught, are utterly without significance and profit; since God exercises no government over this world, and will neither reward virtue nor punish vice.

It is obvious, therefore, that infidelity has no sort of adaptation to mankind at large. If it offer consolation to the pious, it has nothing but terror for the sinful; while if it do for the mass of mankind what they desire, it destroys all encouragement to virtue. Its depraving influence is therefore no accident: it is manifestly an essentially corrupting and demoralizing system. It cannot make men virtuous: it does what it can to prevent any from remaining so. It takes away every check upon vice, confirms the sinner in his depravity, and if allowed its unrestrained influence, would destroy every thing holy and venerable among men, and spread throughout the world, devastation and sorrow, crime and despair.

How lovely in itself, and how admirably adapted to all the circumstances and exigencies of man, is the religion of the New Testament! No measure of moral want is beyond its capacity of supply; no condition of human woe beyond its power of consolation. See how it meets the case of the sinner filled with remorse and apprehension. It does not deny the facts which produce such fearful anguish upon his mind: on the contrary, it places them in a clearer light, and gives them additional weight. It does not deny that he is a sinner, nor that his sins are peculiarly aggravated, nor that he is of himself perfectly impotent. It gives him an increasingly lively apprehension of the heinousness of sin; and places the justice of God before him, as a more inflexible, scrutinizing, and active attribute than he had before conceived. All that his own heart had uttered of condemnation it confirms; and all that his imagination had suggested of terror, it enlarges; and then, when all hope from his own exertions is destroyed, it points him to a divine atonement of infinite merit, and bids him trust therein. Multitudes of men, in such circumstances, have made the experiment, and have obtained perfect deliverance from remorse, exalted peace, and the hope of a blessed immortality. And while Christianity abandons no sinner to despair, it steadily represses sin, offers the highest inducements to righteousness and purity, and abounds in consolation and hope to the virtuous man. As one

strong argument for the being of a God, is to be found in the obvious marks of contrivance in the material creation, so not the weakest proof of the divinity of Christianity, is its obvious and efficacious adaptation to every conceivable moral condition and necessity; and were there no distinct assertion of its authority, this alone would prove him who neglected it to be an irrational man.

Upon the whole, then, the advocate of natural religion is compelled to admit, either that God exerts no moral government over the world, and gives his creatures no inducement to honour him; or that for the majority of mankind, he has made no moral provision at all,—that he has left them in their sins, without any possibility of escape, either from evil here, or from punishment hereafter. The deist has before him irresistible evidence of the impotence and mischievousness of that system, the truth and completeness of which he warmly advocates; and equally powerful proof of the practical efficiency of Christianity, the falsehood of which he nevertheless resolutely maintains. He must believe therefore, that the inventions of men are incomparably better fitted to accomplish the acknowledged purposes of religion, and far more admirably suited to the nature of man, both in his most exalted and in his lowest state,—than the truth of God;—a conclusion in the comparison with which, atheism is both pious and rational.

NOTES.

A.

On the subject of the efficiency of Christianity, the evidence of one of the most eloquent of the latin fathers, is so much in point, that I cannot forbear quoting it here.—

“Daily experiment demonstrates, of how great value to the human mind, are the precepts of God, in their simplicity and truth. Give me a man passionate, ungovernable, abusive in his language; with a very few of the words of God, I will return him to you as placid as a lamb. Give me a greedy, avaricious, and grasping man, and forthwith I will restore him to you a liberal being, casting forth his money by handfuls. Give me a man afraid of pain or death, and without delay, he shall learn to despise the cross, the fire, the torture, and every danger. Give me a debauched man, an adulterer, and you shall immediately behold him sober, chaste, and continent. Give me a cruel, blood-thirsty man, and instantly shall his ferocity be changed into true mildness. Give me an unjust, a foolish, a depraved person, and suddenly he shall become upright, discreet, and innocent. Such is the virtue of divine wisdom, that when it is inspired into the heart of man, it at once expels folly, that fruitful source of evil; to the accomplishment of which, neither wealth, nor books, nor deep study are required. Its benefits are conferred without reward, without difficulty, without delay; only let the ears be opened, and the heart athirst for wisdom. Which of the philosophers could ever effect such a moral improvement of himself or others? Philosophy never achieved more than the concealment of vice, it could not destroy it; whereas but a few of the precepts of God, shall so wholly change a man, that he shall not be identified with his former self.”

The writer of this animated passage, was well qualified to speak on the comparative effects of Christianity and heathen philosophy, having himself been a philosopher. I therefore add his own words at length on this subject.—“ Num quis hæc philosophorum aut unquam præstitit, aut præstare, si velit, potest? Qui cum ætates suas in studio philosophiæ conterant; neque alium quenquam, neque seipsos, (si natura paululum obstitit,) possunt facere meliores. Itaque sapientia eorum, ut plurimum efficiat, non excindit vitia, sed abscondit. Pauca vero Dei præcepta sic totum hominem immutant, et exposito vetere novum reddunt; ut non cognoscas eundem esse.”*

Many other testimonies of the virtue of Christianity, may be found in the writings of the fathers and early apologists. These latter are the more valuable, from having been addressed to the most virulent enemies of our faith: of course therefore they contain nothing which would not endure the most rigid and malignant scrutiny. Among modern writers on the subject, the reader may refer to Horne's introduction to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and to the works quoted by him:—Fuller's gospel its own witness; Ryan's history of the effects of religion on mankind; Bp. Porteus on the beneficial effects of Christianity; and Bogue on the divine authority of the New Testament.

Similar, and of course yet more important evidence to the same effect, may be found scattered up and down the writings of the opposers of Christianity. The well-known letter of Pliny to Trajan, which may be found translated in Milner's history of the church, vol. i. pp. 160-162. is of this kind, with that celebrated passage of Rousseau, beginning, “ I will confess to you that the majesty of the scriptures strikes me with astonishment, &c.” See that and others of a like kind, in Horne's Introduction, vol. i. pp. 421, 461. Suffer me here to add from the writings of the last named infidel, a sentence beautifully illustrative of the political influence of Christianity. “ If all men were perfect Christians, individuals would do their duty; the people would be obedient to the laws; governors would be just, and magistrates incorrupt: the soldiers would despise

* LACTANTIUS.—*Instit. Divin.* l. iii. c. 25.

death, and there would be neither vanity nor luxury in such a state."*

Blount, Tindal, Morgan, Toland, Bolingbroke, and indeed almost all infidels, have more or less strongly, borne testimony to the excellence of Christianity. I must not except even Thomas Paine: one concession at least, he has made in favour of what he generally treats with the most vulgar and impious abuse. It is so far remarkable, that I think it only fair to quote it. He says that "Jesus Christ was a virtuous man; that the morality which he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind; that though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers many years before, and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any." It might no doubt be dangerous to hesitate to receive the testimony of so learned a person as Mr. Paine, respecting the doctrines of Confucius; but who are the Greek philosophers, and who the many good men in all ages? Are Messrs. Voltaire and Rousseau and that race, the amiable illuminators of their times; or are the men of the revolution and Mr. Paine, the good men of a later age, whose personal virtue and pure moral doctrine, place them on so interesting a level with Jesus Christ? Is Saul also among the prophets? One would really suppose, from the flippancy with which infidels talk on these subjects, that the world in every age had been stuffed with consistent teachers of the most exalted morality, and that a vicious man was a sort of monster, who only stalked abroad once in a century, to startle and disgust the moral sense of an immaculate race.

B.

In order more fully to understand what man is without the influence of Christianity, let any one read the ancient mythology, and let him conceive from the character of the deities, what would be that of their worshippers. Not to enter into the impure narrations of the poets on this subject, it is sufficient to refer to the modes of religious homage and festivity,

* *ROUSSEAU du Contrat Social. l. iv. c. 8.*

which obtained among classical heathens, and which indeed were sufficiently characteristic of the divinities to whose honour they were observed. Many of them were grossly obscene, such for instance, as the worship of Cybele, of Bacchus, of Pan Lycæus, the garden god, the Syrian and Cyprian Venus, and the Roman Flora. Even the Eleusinian mysteries, which are represented by some, as affording the purest lessons of philosophical morality, were connected with the most filthy and abominable symbols, and it was probably on this account that Socrates refused to be initiated into them.*

Many other parts of the religion of ancient heathens, were sanguinary and cruel. Innumerable human victims, were destroyed in the worship of Bellona, Dea Syria, Diana Taurica and Diana Orthia, of Moloch; and of Saturn, in ancient Rome, Crete and Carthage; in that of Jupiter Ithemius by the Messenians, of Jupiter Lycæus by the Arcadians, of Jupiter Latialis by the Romans, and of Mars by the Lacedemonians. Diodorus relates that human sacrifices were offered by the Gauls, which Cæsar confirms. The scholiast on Aristophanes asserts the same of the Athenians; and adds that the victims were called *καταζυγία*, that is purificatory sacrifices.† Suetonius affirms the like of the Germans, and Tacitus of the Britons. From these particulars, which yet give a very partial view of the subject, it will not be difficult to conjecture what heathenism generally must have been. The reflection made by Lucretius, after the history of the slaughter of Iphigenia at Aulis, is but too applicable to the whole of the religion of the ancients:—

“Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum!”

To so great a height of wickedness was their religion capable of exciting them!—

Yet notwithstanding these impurities and atrocities, Mr. Hume, who delighted to startle the common sense of mankind,

* See TERTULLIAN, *adversus Valent.* c. i. THEODORET, *Therap.* l. 7. CLEMENT, in *Protrept.* quoted by Dr. More, Works, p. 55.

† This, at least, was probably the original meaning of the word; but it was at length used to describe the entire class of society from which the victims were usually selected. Hence it is currently employed by Greek writers, to signify worthless persons, as well as persons devoted to pious purposes:—a circumstance, trifling indeed in itself, but which nevertheless unequivocally intimates the fearful waste of human life in the rites of ancient idolatry.

does not scruple to affirm, that "the whole mythological system is so natural, that in the vast variety of planets and worlds contained in this universe, it seems *more than probable*, that some where or other, it is really carried into execution!"

Our limits do not allow us to enter into the examination of the ethics of ancient philosophers, nor of their practical results, although they furnish abundant evidence of the insufficiency of man when left to himself. These opinions at least were not chosen in preference to Christianity, and any comparison between it and them, would therefore scarcely be consonant with the practical character of the present argument. There are some particulars, it is only just to remark however, in which the Greek and Roman philosophers and moralists, were superior to modern infidels. Some of them were men of virtuous reputation, although surrounded by licentiousness. They usually treated religious discussions with singular reverence and gravity; and above all, they sought for arguments to prove, what our more maturely sceptical writers have laboured to render incredible,—the moral government and providence of God, the immortality of the human soul, and a future state of retribution.

C.

In the Quarterly Review, (Vol. xvi. p. 279.) a curious anecdote of the prince of modern sceptics, David Hume, is given on the authority of his nephew, who no doubt designed it for the honour of his distinguished relative. Perhaps the reader may have a different opinion of its tendency.

Mr. Hume was in great distress for the loss of his mother, and one of his friends took occasion to remind him, of how much consolation he was in these circumstances deprived, by his rejection of Christianity. His reply was, "Though I throw out my speculations to entertain and employ the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things, I do not think so differently from the rest of mankind as you imagine." Now if this remark has any sort of connexion with the preceding conversation, it means that he had imposed on the world

certain opinions on the subject of Christianity, which he really did not believe. This indeed, is extremely probable, and has been suspected by many who knew nothing of this confession. But alas, what is very pleasant trifling with the learned and metaphysical world, may prove productive of miserable consequences on the minds of the multitude. Accordingly Mr. Hume is to this day supposed to have been a real infidel, and his topics of metaphysical occupation are mistaken for bonâ fide arguments against the scriptures. It will not avail the admirers of Mr. Hume *the infidel*, to be told that the reasonings which have made them sceptics, were only suggestions thrown out by Mr. Hume *the metaphysician* for the excitement of logical play among learned wits. Nor can any mere argumentation however forcible, ever bring such persons back to the point at which they were found, and from which they were deluded, by these unfortunate speculations. If Mr. H. did not mean to promote infidelity, never was there a person to whom the similitude of an ancient writer was more emphatically applicable:—"as a madman who casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour and saith, am not I in sport?"* But Mr. Hume's commendation of adultery, surely is not a speculation designed to employ and entertain the learned and metaphysical world. No; here at least we have no reason to doubt his sincerity; and this fact is of itself sufficiently indicative of the deep turpitude of scepticism.

* Proverbs, xxvi. 18, 19.

CHAPTER III.

INFIDEL OPINIONS OF SCRIPTURE MIRACLES.

The nature and importance of scripture miracles.—The objection that miracles do not prove the truth of Christianity.—Mr. Hume's argument on miracles.—Miracles admitted by modern Infidels not to have been wrought by magic.—The opinion that scripture miracles were jugglers' tricks.—Miracles not natural events.—The history of scripture miracles pronounced fabulous.—The passage of the Red Sea considered—and the resurrection of Christ.—Conclusion.—NOTE, on the several versions of the Pentateuch.

HAVING, in the preceding chapter, considered the practical absurdity of infidelity, we now proceed to examine the methods employed by the unbeliever, to invalidate the external evidences of the truth of Christianity.—The Bible teaches us, that the divine mission of certain individuals, and the divine authority of certain doctrines, were authenticated by miracles—that is, by *works beyond the power of nature, or contrary to its known laws*. The interest of these events, is represented as having been intended to be permanent; and hence, at the time of the occurrence of several, commemorative festivals were appointed, some of

which, such as the Jewish feast of unleavened bread and the Christian Sabbath, have been observed down to our own times. Whatever authority was originally indicated by miracles, remains unimpaired by the lapse of time; hence while the inquiry into their credibility is highly important to every Christian, who would understand the grounds of his faith, it is essential to the existence of infidelity, that by some means, they should be rendered nugatory or incredible.

Some unbelievers affirm, that there is no connexion between miracles and the authority of the scriptures. They tell us, that even if it be shown that miracles were actually wrought by Moses, by Christ, and by his apostles, the truth of the Bible remains as doubtful as it was before:—that is, if a man assert that he is authorized by God to instruct mankind, and that he has the power to invert the order of nature in proof of the divinity of his commission, it will be proper for us to discredit his claims, even should we see him actually effect an inversion of the laws of nature. To illustrate this doctrine: if an individual arrive in a distant province of the empire, representing himself as deputed by his sovereign to exercise certain legislative and executive functions, and if he affirm that he possesses the sign manual of the prince as his warrant, it is the duty of the local authorities to disobey and treat him as an impostor, though they know from personal observation, that he has what he asserts. And

what is the weighty reason assigned for such conduct? Why, in good sober philosophy, there is no connexion between the seal or signature of a prince, and the performance of various acts of legislation! Let the value of this argument be tried in some of the colonies of the British empire, and its admirers will probably be met by a species of reasoning sufficiently palpable to convince them of its absurdity.

Perhaps the most celebrated argument against scripture miracles is that which was first employed by Mr. Hume.—*As an inversion of the laws of nature is contrary to experience, while it is not contrary to experience that men should testify what is false, we ought not to give any credit to one who pretends to have witnessed such an event.* The whole force of this sophism lies in the ambiguity of the words “experience,” and “contrary to.” If by “experience” is meant *individual* experience, then the same argument will enable a blind man to prove that there is no such thing as a rainbow, thus—a rainbow is an object contrary to my experience, but it is not contrary to my experience that men should state what is untrue. So an inhabitant of the torrid zone may disprove the existence of ice; and a large proportion of the subjects of king William the fourth may satisfy themselves, that there never was a murder committed, since they were never murdered themselves, nor saw any other person murdered.

But if by "experience" is to be understood *universal* experience, then the assertion that a miracle is contrary to experience, is in effect saying, that no one ever witnessed a miracle, which is assuming the question in dispute. If by "experience" is meant the *ordinary* experience of men in general, then the argument is merely this:—an inversion of the laws of nature is not an event which men in general are in the habit of witnessing, but it is no rarity for a man to be guilty of falsehood; therefore we ought not to believe that a miracle was ever wrought. In other words, a miracle is not an event of daily occurrence; therefore there never was a miracle. Is not the following quite as rational?—An earthquake is not an event which men in general are in the habit of witnessing; but it no rarity for a man to be guilty of falsehood; therefore all accounts of earthquakes are fabulous:—or a naval battle is not an affair of daily occurrence; therefore there never was a naval battle. In short every thing less common than the utterance of falsehood, it is, according to Mr. Hume, absurd to believe.

But if this mode of reasoning be of any value, it proves, not only that men should never believe the testimony of others to a miracle, or indeed to any rare event; but that if they supposed they themselves witnessed such an incident, they ought to discredit the testimony of their own senses. For example; were we, in company with a million other persons, to fancy that we saw the sea

divided, and that we passed between its parted waters on dry ground, we ought to believe that we were deceived; because it is contrary to experience for the sea to be thus divided, but not uncommon for men to be the subjects of ocular illusion.

But how am I to be satisfied, that even the former proposition is true, and that events which I should deem miraculous, do not take place daily, in some part of the world? By what means am I to be assured, that the regularity which I remark in the operations of nature, is not frequently interrupted, in places beyond my opportunities of observation? My experience supplies nothing like satisfaction; because, though I never witnessed any deviation from what I believe to be the laws of nature, yet there are countless other phenomena, to which I am equally a stranger, which I am nevertheless compelled to believe; and which the infidel believes just as readily and as cordially as I do, although his experience may be quite as defective as mine. I never saw a shipwreck, nor the fall of a meteoric stone, nor the amputation of a limb; and yet that such things have been, I have no hesitation in believing on the *testimony* of others; nor could any future experience of mine, render me at all more certain of these and a thousand similar events. For the same reason, I am satisfied of the regularity of the operations of nature; for even of the experience of men in general, I cannot know any thing,

except from their *testimony* ; and I am compelled, in innumerable instances, to receive testimony which totally differs from the testimony of my own experience. The amount of the argument, therefore, is this.—Men in general *testify* that they never witnessed a miracle ; but we know that mankind is sadly given to lying :—therefore we *ought to believe their TESTIMONY*, and to conclude that no miracle ever occurred.¹

In the foregoing remarks, we have supposed the phrase “contrary to” to mean *differing from*, which is the only sense in which the assertion that miracles are contrary to experience—possesses the smallest appearance of plausibility. That fact only can be properly *contrary* to my experience,

1. Were no important practical interests involved in the present argument, it would be amusing to observe the infidel's extremely clumsy attempts, to maintain the worthlessness of naked testimony, and yet to justify himself for giving it continual and entire credit. He believes, for example, that in some instances, stones have fallen from considerable heights in the atmosphere:—not however because individuals *testify* that they have actually witnessed the fall of meteoric stones :—this of course is quite incredible ;—but because certain naturalists *testify*, that they have analysed *some* of the stones *said* to be meteoric ; and because they further *affirm* that they find them all to consist, not of limestone or sandstone, but—mark the weighty secret !—of iron, nickel, earth, &c. ; and this to a sceptical philosopher, it appears, is satisfactory evidence that such substances actually fell from the heavens !!! This is no caricature. The reader will find this argument actually employed by one of Mr. Hume's admirers, in an insidious article in the Edinburgh Review, (No. xlvi. Art. iii.) the sophisms of which are fully exposed and refuted in Gleig's edition of Stackhouse's History of the Bible, Vol. iii. p. 240, *et seq.* London. 1817.

the distinct contradiction to which my experience affords. If a man tell me that on the first of August 1831, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, the Thames was sufficiently frozen to allow passengers to walk and ride over it; I say, that is contrary to my experience, for at that hour, I saw its waters sparkling in the sunshine, and innumerable boats floating up and down on its surface. No man can pronounce the resurrection of Lazarus contrary to experience, who did not see his body lying torpid and putrefying in the sepulchre, at the moment at which it was said to have been reanimated. A miracle in short is only contrary to the experience of a person present, at the time when, and in the place where, it is said to have been wrought, who is enabled from personal observation, to testify the untruth of such a relation. There is not, therefore, one scripture miracle, which has the slightest semblance of being contrary to experience. It is true that of the resurrection of Christ the soldiers who guarded his sepulchre, said, "his disciples came and stole him away *while we slept*;" but this, even supposing them to have been sincere, was only contrary to surmise, for how could they know what occurred while they slept? In this case therefore, we are called to decide, not by any abstract reasoning on opposition to, or accordance with experience, but by the *testimony* of the contradicting parties,—the character respectively of each class of witnesses,—the possibilities or

probabilities involved in the opposing statements, &c. &c.¹

The principle on which Mr. Hume founds the argument now under consideration, is that events become certain in proportion to the frequency of their recurrence; so that,—as the testimonies of our own senses as well as the statements of other men are to be accredited by experience alone—a patient suffering under the gout for the first time, is not so certain of the fact of his pain by ten degrees, as the man who has already had ten similar attacks; or he who to-day, for the first time in his life, sees a volcano, is immeasurably less assured of its existence, than the inhabitant of the adjacent valley; or it is necessary for a mariner to take half a dozen voyages, in order that he may be quite sure that he was ever at sea. It is much more credible that the sun rose to-day, than on the first day on which his rising was observed; or the second instance of death which occurred in the world, was more certain than the first, the third than the second, and so on; or it is far more probable that General Wolfe sailed to America, than that Pizarro did so. We have multiplied the illustrations, that the reader may have an opportunity of applying the principle in a variety of ways.

Some of the earliest opposers of Christianity, asserted that the miracles of Christ and his apos-

1. See the Preparatory considerations prefixed by Paley to his *Evidences of Christianity*.

bles, were wrought by magic. It was inconvenient for these persons to represent the history of New Testament miracles as fabulous; since they lived in an age when such events were matters of too great notoriety, to allow this summary method of discrediting them. Modern infidels however have agreed, that there is no such power as that assigned to magic. This denial they are compelled to make, or they must admit the existence of the invisible world. To avoid an alternative so embarrassing, it imports little to them, how ridiculous they render their predecessors in unbelief, and how utterly futile they prove their arguments. A future generation of sceptics, will perhaps be similarly kind and respectful to them.¹ We desire no coalition with the infidel for the support of our faith, but when he breaks the shafts of his allies, we cannot affect to lament their destruction.

It has been affirmed that the miracles of the Bible were mere legerdemain, jugglers' tricks, by which the beholders were deluded:—that is to say; Moses cheated the senses of many hundred thousand people so fully, as to make them believe

1. Take a single specimen of this sort of retribution:—"Voltaire," said a female Jacobin, "was a bigot; he was nothing but a deist!" The fair enthusiast might however have spared her indignation. Voltaire was wicked enough to have been an avowed, as he was a concealed atheist; but his times were not ripe for any thing beyond the private profession of atheism; and the philosopher of Fernay had not sufficient courage to anticipate the mature infamy of the age of the revolution.

that he divided the sea so that they passed through it on dry ground ; that a stream of water gushed from a rock at the stroke of his rod, and followed them during their wanderings in the desert ; that they were miraculously fed from heaven for forty years, &c. &c. Christ too only appeared to raise the dead, to feed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, to calm the wind and the sea, &c.—yet no one witness of these acts had penetration enough to discover the fraud, or the virtue to expose it if detected ; and in consequence, they then passed for miracles, and by some foolish and credulous people, have been deemed such ever since. Alas, alas, on what degenerate days of jugglery have we fallen ! Let all modern masters of tricks hide their diminished heads. Their art instead of advancing with the progress of society, has sadly receded, since Moses palmed his frauds upon a great nation, who still reverence his memory almost to idolatry ; and since the college of Nazarene conjurers imposed on the senses of multitudes, whose interest and most ardent desire it was, to detect their imposture !

But perhaps some wrongheaded being, whose Christianity is incorrigible, will say that this solution of the question only removes the difficulty, by creating another equally great. It accounts for one series of miracles, by supposing the existence of many. It is of little consequence, *as it respects the miracle*, whether Moses actually led the people of Israel through the Red Sea,

according to the history in the Pentateuch, or merely induced them to believe so, according to the opinion of certain modern philosophers. The miracle in the latter case would be as great as in the former, or even greater. It would be quite as easy to dry up the straits of Dover, as to persuade all the men, women, and children, in the county of Kent, that they passed those straits, by the power of a miracle which divided their waters. When the infidel therefore has *proved* what he now only *asserts*,—that the miracles of scripture were mere sleight of hand tricks, his object, instead of being realized, will be rendered more distant and perplexed.

These last remarks will apply also to the opinion that the events recorded in scripture as miraculous, were merely the results of natural causes. If so, they may no doubt be repeated, and for example, five thousand men with a considerable number of women and children may again, after long abstinence, be satisfied with five loaves and two fishes. We may be pardoned for remaining sceptical on this subject, till the experiment be successfully tried. Meanwhile we protest against all attempts to interpret the history of scripture in any way, except such as is justified by common sense, and the common use of language. To suppose that it is not true in the ordinary acceptation of the terms in which it is conveyed, is to accuse its authors of intentional imposition: if it be not literally true, it is not

true at all; and whether scripture history may rationally be deemed fabulous, we shall consider in the sequel. The following considerations will, I think, sufficiently evince the absurdity of the notion, that the miracles of the Bible were the results of any occult power of nature; and it is worse than absurd to affirm, that they were effected by any known agency.

“Man’s inventions have never leapt out at once to their final consequence and effect, but have always been prepared and preceded by numberless failures, and unsuccessful experiments. But the miracles of the BIBLE all succeeded at once, without failure, without error; without previous experiment:—and still more, without any scientific apparatus. All the accessions to human power, which have been acquired during the longest period of which there are any traces in history, have been acquired solely by an improved method of working, or by means of the improvements which have been made in instruments and machinery. The analogy is therefore, that all future improvements will be made similarly by the aid of such methods and processes. But the miracles of scripture were performed without any process, ‘He spake and it was done.’ He blessed and brake, and five thousand were fed with five barley loaves and two small fishes.

“Though the cataract may be removed by the art of the surgeon, or though the galvanic battery could recall life to the dead; yet the giving of

sight by anointing the eyes with spittle, or the calling up of Lazarus by a word from the tomb, are no less evidently the acts of a superhuman agent, than they would have been, if blindness were still universally incurable, or if Volta and Galvani never had been born. It is quite plain therefore, that though we were to indulge the wildest and most irrational reveries as to the future improvement of human science and art, we yet should not advance a step towards the presumption, that human art will ever be equal to the performance of any such works as scripture miracles."¹

The most summary and convenient way to terminate the controversy, is boldly to denounce the history of the Bible as altogether fabulous. He who does this, needs no argument, no research, no evasion: he requires nothing but an unblushing front, and a remorseless conscience;—and if to these he can add some choice lampoon on the book the truth of which he denies, or some pungent expression of contempt for the intellects of those who believe in it, and for the futility of its alleged evidences; or, best of all, if by a parade of learning, he can establish some sort of resemblance between any mythological fooleries and the history of the scriptures, and persuade his followers of their equality,—he has done as much as, in the estimation of many, the case requires, and he retires from the arena with a supercilious

1. PENROSE *on the Evidence of Scripture Miracles*.

smile, leaving his neophytes agape with admiration, or chuckling with delight.

The miracles of the Bible however are matters of plain history, and by the ordinary rules for authenticating historical testimony, they are to be judged. To prove them or any other parts of scripture history false, by instituting a parallel between them and some of the fables of heathen poets, is just as ingenious and forcible as if a man should demonstrate the worthlessness of the writings of Arrian, by discovering some coincidence between his history of the expedition of Alexander, and that of the wanderings of Don Quixote; and who can for a moment doubt, but that something very plausible and clever, might be said on such a subject? As to reducing the Bible to an entire allegorical fable,—for what will not men attempt?—you may as rationally allegorize the annals of Tacitus. In examining the miracles of the Bible, we repeat, we have to do with plain historical testimony. A man may deny that there ever existed such a person as Julius Cæsar, or such a city as Babylon,—that there are such things as volcanoes, or that the sun is larger than a coach-wheel, but it would be monstrous to suppose, that such denials cast any sort of doubt on the historical or scientific facts to which they referred. If the infidel imagines that the miracles, or any other historical parts of the Bible, are rendered at all questionable by his mere denial of them, then we have ample

right to accuse him of the most gross absurdity: if he does not, and yet makes the denial, with the wish to impose on others by naked effrontery, he is liable to a far more serious accusation. Between the two we leave him to make his choice, while we proceed to detail more particularly, the consequences of his position, for which of course, he is responsible, however silly, monstrous, or incredible.

Let us then slightly examine but two scripture miracles; one from the Old, and the other from the New Testament. The first shall be that, to which we have already referred, which is related in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Exodus. The history in short is, that the Israelites, to the number of about two million persons,¹ with a large quantity of cattle, having escaped from Egypt, were pursued by the army of Pharaoh to the borders of the Red Sea. At the stretching forth of the hand of Moses, over the waters of that sea, they parted, and left a road, by which the Israelites passed into Arabia, while the Egyptians attempting to follow them, were destroyed by the return of the waters.

The Jews have the record of this event, both in Hebrew and Chaldee. There are other records agreeing with it in all respects, extant in the

1. There were six hundred thousand warriors. The women, children, and mixed multitude who accompanied them, cannot be estimated at much less than three times that number.

Samaritan character, which were possessed by the inhabitants of the territory of Samaria. In addition to these, there is the testimony of the Greek version of the Old Testament, commonly called the Septuagint, to the same effect.¹ In the relation, the Jew, the Samaritan, and the Christian equally believe, and the record of it, is admitted by them all, to be nearly as ancient as the transaction itself. Now the Jews and the Samaritans heartily hated each other, and Christians have from the beginning, been the objects of Jewish enmity. If then this history of the Pentateuch be untrue, it is necessary to conclude, that these three hostile parties, at some remote period, laid aside for a time all their mutual dislike, and met together to concoct, among sundry other equally monstrous inventions, the fable of the passage of the Red Sea;—that they unanimously agreed upon all the details of this imposture, and that when they had arranged their plans to deceive mankind,—which deception could not possibly advantage any of the parties,—they returned to their former hostility, inveighed against each other in every conceivable way, and each sought to diminish the reputation of the others before the world, while each maintained the most perfect secrecy and fidelity, as to the fable which was the result of the united knavery of the whole!

1. See the note at the conclusion of the chapter, for brief notices of these versions.

He who believes this probable, will have no difficulty, as to the minor arrangements of this unparalleled conspiracy. He will be able to mark out with tolerable distinctness, the period and place of such a transaction.¹ He will readily find accommodation and provision for the millions engaged in it, for a few weeks, or if need be, months; and though events so comparatively insignificant as the general councils of Christendom, have in their time, made a great noise in the world,—he will not be perplexed to assign sufficient reason, for the privacy with which the meeting in question was conducted.

But if this method of solution be esteemed inadmissible, then the only alternative is, that each of these separate and mutually hostile parties, under a strong desire to deceive the world into a belief, which would be of no sort of profit to themselves, simultaneously, and without any collusion, fabricated the same narration, accidentally invented the same details, and expressed them in precisely the same phraseology. These remarks apply equally to all the other miracles of the old Testament, and the man who denounces scripture history as fabulous, is welcome to whichever of these schemes for explaining them—may seem most agreeable to his taste.

Nor will it avail the infidel to affirm, that the passage of the Red Sea, was an invention more

1. It is certain however, that it could not have taken place earlier than the reign of Vespasian. A. C. 70. *vide c. iv. infra.*

ancient than the feud between the Jews and the Samaritans. Its history stands inseparably connected with the system of Jewish law, both secular and religious. He therefore who supposes the one to have been an imposition, must admit the other to have been equally so. He must believe that a code was framed, and that a series of religious observances was appointed, by an unauthorized individual, and that the Israelites were induced to believe, that both they and their fathers, had been governed by the one, and had submitted to the other, although not one of them had ever before heard of either. Or even suppose that the fraud were imputed to Moses himself, the absurdity of the case would not be at all lessened; since, unless Moses succeeded in propagating this monstrous invention, in opposition to the testimony of the senses of several million persons, they must all have been confederates in the fraud, and have readily submitted to a series of inconvenient regulations, merely from the wish, that posterity might be imposed upon by a fable, the belief of which would not be of the smallest advantage to any of its inventors.

“But this was a suspension or an inversion of the laws of nature.”—True, or it had been no miracle. “And of this ‘the improbability is so strong that no testimony can prevail against it.’”¹ Very well sir: have it as you please. It is of

1. Edinburgh Review, Vol. xxiii. p. 329. (*Vide* p. 65, *supra*.)

course by no means improbable, that two million persons should unite to attest an unprofitable lie. That is without doubt a very likely thing, and very easy to be believed. "Why I grant that in another case, such an united evidence would be weighty; but in this case, there is the law of nature you know,—the law of nature." Your jealousy for the honour of nature is without question exceedingly creditable, but did it never occur to you, that some degree of respect was due to that being, for whose convenience its laws were at first stamped on the material creation? Rely upon it, there are laws of man's moral nature, far more noble than those which regulate the phenomena of the material universe, and quite as little liable to change; and one of these determines men to speak the truth. The operation of this law may be interrupted by the hope of some advantage; just as a globe of silk filled with inflammable air is able to overcome the force of gravitation, or as a feather may be whirled aloft by a current of wind; but as, when the gas has escaped, and the wind is hushed, the law of gravity resumes its former influence over such bodies, so when the prospect of advantage is withdrawn, the disposition to speak the truth again predominates in every sane mind. Hence the utterance of falsehood, with the sincere intention to produce permanent error, is always attended with a sense of effort; and the greatest liar in the world utters a thousand truths for every

single falsehood. That the omnipotent Creator should, for a great moral end, deviate in a single instance from the ordinary course of his government of nature, is to the infidel utterly incredible. He is quite shocked at such an outrageous supposition. He loses all patience with us for crediting any thing so monstrous, and can scarcely maintain ordinary decency in his behaviour towards such wickedly credulous people. But that a law of man's moral nature should be simultaneously and for ever reversed in two million instances, is a thing which he can easily believe. Nothing indeed can be more probable. It is all but self-evident; and with this conclusion, so remarkable at once for its amiableness and rationality, he sits down with calm satisfaction,—a philosopher and a sceptic!

Of all scripture miracles, the resurrection of Christ is the most important, because if proved, it at once establishes the authority of the Bible. Such an event could only take place by the power of God: the power of God would not be exerted in favour of an imposture; if therefore Christ were raised from the dead, the divinity of his mission is beyond all question, and the truth of Christianity being thus demonstrated, the divine authority of the Old Testament is authenticated as a necessary consequence. Here then we take our stand: if the infidel can shew that his contradiction of this miracle does not involve himself in absurdity, we are content to admit that we are

wrong, and to forego our faith ; but if a denial of Christ's resurrection cannot be maintained, except by supposing the whole tide of human motive and feeling changed,—by making man a contradiction and a mystery—by rejecting all sorts of testimony, and believing without reason and against reason, the very contrary of that of which there is accumulated evidence,—then we require every one who would not for ever forfeit his reputation as a rational man, to abide by the consequences,—in other words, to admit the resurrection of Christ to be the noblest and most perfectly satisfactory proof of the divine authority of Christianity and the Bible.

Of the resurrection of Christ, there are three sorts of evidence. The first is that of his friends, a multitude who saw him alive after his crucifixion. These persons were sufficiently intelligent not to have been themselves deceived ; in fact, a removal of one degree from idiotism, was sufficient to secure them from any delusion. They were people of integrity, and therefore would not seek to impose upon others. They had no conceivable motive falsely to assert that Christ was risen, but every inducement to affirm the contrary. If the infidel be right, they must have loved falsehood, and wickedness, and cruelty, and have coveted shame, pain, imprisonment, confiscation, exile, and death, because they conceived them to be real advantages,—things worthy to be sought and loved on their own account, since on no other

supposition can we understand their conduct.¹

The second class of witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, are those persons who put him to death,—the members of the Jewish priesthood and council. These of all men, were most interested in detecting the falsehood of the apostles. If Christ were actually risen from the dead, those who crucified him were eternally infamous. They were proved to have persecuted with unrelenting rigour, and even to the death, a man unimpeachably innocent and illustriously virtuous,—the most eminent and favoured of all the messengers whom God had commissioned to instruct the Jewish nation or the world, even the long expected Messiah; and since on them peculiarly devolved the honour of welcoming his advent, attending his ministry, and celebrating his triumphs, their double sin of contemptuous rejection and ferocious murder,—was aggravated to the highest degree. Every preacher of the resurrection of Christ was in effect the publisher of their infamy, and there were not wanting those by whom they were explicitly accused. Nor was the accusation made in a remote part of Judea: it was preferred against them in Jerusalem itself, even before their minds could have been free from excitement against Christ and his doctrine.

Reputation of one sort or other, is dear to every man; and usually the more highly a person is

1. This subject is resumed and more fully discussed in chapter v.

exalted in society, the more solicitous is he, both to be free from disgrace, and from the suspicion of deserving it. Especially is it so, when noted professions of virtue, are associated with elevated rank. An innocent man desires nothing more ardently than an opportunity to defend himself from calumny, as publicly and extensively as that calumny has been circulated. Even a guilty man, who knows that there is no evidence against him, is generally when accused, loud in his professions of innocence. But if instead of meeting a charge publicly preferred against him,—a person of exalted rank, who is usually, beyond men in general, watchful over his reputation, and who has every conceivable facility for vindicating himself,—has no resource but to threaten his accuser, and tries not to repair the mischief already done to his character, but merely by the force of terror, to prevent the accusation from spreading more extensively,—every one capable of drawing a rational inference, deems his behaviour the most convincing proof of his guilt, and of his consciousness, that there exists evidence sufficiently powerful for his conviction.

This explains the nature and force of the testimony which the Jewish rulers bore to the resurrection of Christ. They were publicly accused; no men could be more jealous of their reputation than they commonly proved themselves; they had every facility for ascertaining and publishing the truth:—the soldiers who

guarded the sepulchre of Christ, and the apostles who testified to his resurrection, were equally in their power, yet they never publicly examined either party, much less confronted the one with the other. They punished the apostles, and tried to stop their proceedings by threats, but they never ventured even on the simple denial of the resurrection, although we have no reason to esteem them peculiarly scrupulous. Nay more; one of them advised his associates to let the matter rest: if it were an imposture, it would come to nothing, but he argued it might be a divine work, in which the apostles were engaged, and therefore, he exhorted them to beware lest they fought against God;¹ which surely was going as far as possible, in testifying against themselves. They must have known whether Christ was risen or not; and if they knew, that he, having died the death of a malefactor, was still dead,—as the infidel of course must assert they did,—never was advice more silly, and never was there greater madness than to give it the slightest attention.

We will take their own argument therefore:—if Christ were not risen, the system founded on the doctrine of his resurrection, must have come to nothing, and is not this rational enough?—but it has survived the revolutions of nearly two thousand years, and is perhaps at this day, more fully known than it ever was before. The result is obvious: the Jewish rulers, both by implica-

1. Acts v. 39.

tion and distinct admission, are witnesses to the miracle of the resurrection. The infidel therefore, must either believe them to have been secretly in league with the apostles, and covetous of infamy for its own sake, as their allies were ambitious of sorrow, shame, or martyrdom; or he must suppose them the most consummate and insensate fools ever heard of—excepting only those who were the objects of their persecution, the first preachers of Christianity.

The Christian sabbath is the third evidence of the resurrection of Christ. This has from the beginning of Christianity, been observed as a weekly commemoration of that event. According to the infidel, this festival is idle, causeless, and unaccountable. Legislators of eminent states, moralists of the first class, antiquarians of the most remote research, and historians of profound investigation, have sanctioned the troublesome, unmeaning, and senseless observance of certain forms, once a week, among all classes of the community, as memorials of an event which in reality never occurred.

Such are the conclusions to which the infidel is compelled to arrive. They require no comment. We leave them to his own consideration. For the honour of human reason, it is to be hoped that they have never occurred to the generality of the rejectors of our faith. Were scepticism a mere intellectual obliquity, one might naturally suppose, that even a cursory exposure of its mon-

strous results, would lead its votaries to abandon it in disgust and shame; but alas, it is a disease of the heart, and requires a moral and not an intellectual remedy. Many have argued themselves into infidelity, but never was there one disengaged from it by the power of argument alone. Music to the ear of death is not more profitless. But if that Jesus who was once dishonoured among men, but who is now for ever glorified by God,—shall vouchsafe to these pages his own influence, the sceptical and wavering reader will not only be convinced of the fact of the resurrection, but will discover in it the symbol and source of a spiritual process in his own mind, similarly marvellous, transforming, and divine.

To the believer in Jesus, there is no difficulty or hesitation in the hope that his own body shall be reanimated, restored to consciousness and beauty, and crowned with immortal honour. Light does not flow from the sun more naturally, than the resurrection of the Christian results from the resurrection of Christ. To the infidel, immortality and the resurrection, if ever the ideas cross his mind, are objects of aversion and not of desire. The noblest ambition of his heart, and the great labour of his concentrated intellectual energies, is to prove the fairest system of virtue, joy, and hope,—a fable; to render futurity a dark, unconscious, loveless blank; and to convince himself and all mankind, that he shall die like a dog and rot.

NOTE.

It will perhaps tend to the elucidation of the argument, to offer a few remarks on the several copies of the Pentateuch, mentioned above.

1. Of the extraordinary attention employed by the Jews, in order to the incorrupted preservation of the integrity of the Hebrew text, Mr. Butler remarks, in his *Horæ Biblicæ*:—"The Jews bestowed on the copies made by them, even an excess of care. It has been a constant rule with them, that, whatever is considered as corrupt, shall never be used, but shall be burnt, or otherwise destroyed. A book of the law wanting but one letter, with one letter too much, or with an error in one single letter, written with any thing but ink, or written on parchment made of the hide of an unclean animal, or on parchment not purposely prepared for that use, or prepared by any but an Israelite, or on skins of parchment tied together by unclean strings, shall be holden to be corrupt: that no word shall be written, without a line first drawn on the parchment; no word written by heart, or without having been first orally pronounced by the writer: that before he writes the name of God he shall wash his pen; that no letter shall be joined to another; and that, if the blank parchment cannot be seen all round each letter, the roll shall be corrupt. There are settled rules for the length and breadth of each sheet, and for the space to be left between each letter, each word, and each section. These Maimonides mentions as some of the principal rules to be observed in copying the sacred rolls.

"But the attention of the Jews was by no means confined to the writing of the copies of the holy word; they made almost incredible exertions to preserve the genuineness and integrity of the text. They counted all the verses, words, and letters of all the twenty-four books of the Old Testament, and of each of those twenty-four books, and of every section of each book, and

of all its subdivisions. 'They counted the number of all the similar words of each section, and of every subdivision. For instance, so many times the word ELOHIM occurs in the first subdivision of the first section, so many times in the second, &c. They counted every word that must be written with a certain letter, which is called full with such a letter, and which word, would have the same sound without that letter. They counted every word that must be written without such a letter, and which word would have the same pronounciation if written with that letter. They pointed out every verse in which such or any other word occurs, by mentioning the first three or four words, the first part of each sentence in which that word is written, in such and such a manner, that is, with or without such a letter, &c.' "

2. The Samaritans were partly of Hebrew extraction. Their language was originally the same as that of the Jews, differing only, at a later period of their history, in the character in which it was written. The feud which existed between these two nations, was very ancient, and like other religious animosities, exceedingly bitter. Had it commenced after the completion of the Old Testament canon, there would have been no reason, why each party should not have preserved its own copy of the prophets and hagiography, as well as of the law; and the circumstance of the Jews only possessing the latter scriptures, or admitting their plenary authority, proves that they were not written while there was any considerable commerce between these two nations. This fact alone therefore gives to the Samaritan Pentateuch an undeniable date of more than four hundred years before the Christian æra.

Another proof of its antiquity, is that the ancient Hebrew language, in which it is written, ceased to be the vernacular language of the Samaritans at a very remote period; and hence, it became necessary to have the sacred books translated into the vulgar Samaritan. The original text and this version, both in the Samaritan character, may be found in the London Polyglot, Tom. I. Besides this, there was a Greek version, made for the use of those Samaritans, who only understood that language, as the Septuagint was used by the Hellenistic Jews.*

* See Prideaux's Connections, Vol. I. pt. i. b. 6.

To the believer in the divine authority of the Bible, there appears a remarkable proof of God's providence in the existence of these distinct editions of the books of Moses ;—preserved as they were, for centuries before the Christian æra, by nations so notoriously hostile to each other, and handed to us, after the lapse of between two and three thousand years, by the undoubted posterity of their respective original possessors :—each having been the foundation of several versions, which in their turn, have tended to confirm the authority of their originals :—neither varying from the other, so as at all to affect the credibility of the history or the authority of the doctrines of the Pentateuch, and yet each sufficiently distinct to prove its perfect independency, and to shew the specific difference between the religious opinions and customs of the Jews and the Samaritans.

3. The Greek version of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, was undertaken by the command of Ptolemy Philadelphus, who reigned in Egypt A. C. 280. It was from the beginning received by the Hellenistic Jews, and was read in the synagogues throughout Egypt, Greece, Asia, and even in Jerusalem itself, the Hebrew being understood by the scribes and priests only. One of the most decisive proofs of the estimation in which it was held, is to be found in the abundant use made of it by the writers of the New Testament, which, whatever credit may otherwise attach to them, proves at least that it was a version in common use in that age. Upwards of one hundred and fifty passages in the New Testament are quoted from the Septuagint, and many of them without the slightest literal alterations. These may be found in Horne's Introduction.*

The miraculous passage of the Red Sea to which the text refers, is related alike by the Hebrew, the Septuagint, and the Targum or Chaldee paraphrase, on the part of the Jew ; and by the Hebreo-Samaritan, and the Samaritan version, on that of the Samaritan, with which, in all essential facts, Josephus agrees. Vide *Antiq.* l. ii. c. 15, 16. Beyond this accumulated written testimony, it is proper to remark, that the Arabic names of places in the neighbourhood of which this prodigy is alleged to have occurred, give a strong confirmation of the

* Vol. II. pp. 386-424.

history of Moses. The encampment of Israel is in the book of Exodus called PHI-HAHIROTH, which signifies *the mouth of holes*. The present Arabic name of that point on the borders of the Red Sea, which corresponds with the Phi-Hahiroth of Moses is THOUAIRECQ, i. e. *gaping holes or conduits*, names obviously of the same origin, and probably derived from some small reservoirs in that place, of which the remains are still to be observed. The plain at the extremity of which Thouairecq is situated, is now called the plain of BEDE—the *unparalleled prodigy*. Its northern extremity is a range of craggy mountains—the BAAL ZEPHON, (*Lord of the North*) of Scripture,—now named EUTAUQA, which signifies both *north* and *place of deliverance*. The southern boundary of Bede is a similar range, the loftiest point of which is now called KORICABE, which is synonymous with MIGDOL of the Hebrew, both words describing an elevated and impregnable situation.*

* PERE SICARD quoted in SCHIMMELPENNINCK'S *Biblical fragments*. VOL. I. pp. 201-203.

CHAPTER IV.

INFIDEL OPINIONS OF SCRIPTURE PROPHECIES.

Scripture prophecy worthy of a divine Author—and likely to win belief.—Mr. Paine's abuse of the prophets of the Old Testament.—The absurdity of the opinion that the prophecies were written after the events to which they are supposed to allude—or that prophecy was fulfilled by mere casualty.—The predictions of Moses respecting the dispersion and calamities of the children of Israel.—Prophecies referring to Christ.—The prophets destitute of all ordinary motive.—Infidelity dishonourable to God.

PRESCIENCE belongs to God alone; but no reason appears why man may not be divinely instructed on the subject of futurity. There is no natural obstacle on his part, to the reception of such information, since he is capable of memory and hope; nor any apparant moral hinderance on the part of God, to its communication. He who believes that God could certainly reveal the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and a future state, is, *à fortiori*, compelled to admit, that on less important future events, there is no law which constrains the Deity to hold his rational creatures in entire ignorance. God, it is true, cannot

demean himself to provide materials for the gratification of mere curiosity; but there are high and worthy objects which prophecy may be made to subserve. Its design is as consistent with the divine dignity, as its materials are the exclusive provision of the divine wisdom. In the case of the patriarchs and their immediate descendants, it was employed to supply and feed moral motive of the highest kind. The Old Testament predictions of the Messiah, exerted a highly valuable spiritual influence upon the minds of the wisest and best of the Jewish nation. The prophetic scriptures are powerful in warnings to the wicked, and consolations to the virtuous; and especially, they possess in themselves, and furnish to the other parts of the Bible, irrefragable evidence of divinity and inspiration.

No excellency of arrangement can transcend that of a system of morals, which by its proper tone and essential sanctions, renders needless a long process of research and inquiry, and produces immediately the impression of supreme and divine authority. Such we esteem the instructions of the prophetic scriptures. We readily grant that this is not their effect upon a proud, cavilling, and sceptical mind: and herein the fitness of this mode of divine communication is the more apparent; since it proves a test of the moral state of all who receive it. He who will honour God by confidence in his fidelity, is thus distinguished from him who offers his Creator an assent

which he cannot withhold, and reluctantly yields up his unbelief, only because it is impossible for him to retain it any longer. Faith, devotion, and patience are terms which the infidel does not understand; or things which, as far as he knows, he despises. To the Christian, they are of the highest value; and to his perception, the prophetic scriptures contain strong presumption of their own divinity, in the single fact, that they at once try and strengthen these moral accomplishments of his character.

How grand and imposing a spectacle does the system of scripture prophecy present to the mind of the believer!—commencing almost with the birth of time, and enlarging through successive periods, in clearness and lustre;—associated now with the pastoral habits of a patriarchal age, then with the infant glories of a great nation, and its rudiments of legislation and manners;—connected first, with the comparatively rude erection of the wilderness tabernacle and its ceremonies, and afterwards, with the splendour of the temple and its service; uniting a dispensation of sense with a dispensation of faith, and a gorgeous ceremonial with the sorrow, and shame, and purity, —“the kingdom and patience of Jesus!”—embracing the fates, happy or disastrous, of cities, states, and empires, and the destinies of life and eternity to countless myriads of men;—bearing us forward, through diversified moral scenery, to a universal reign of peace and purity, by the

ministrations of the Gospel; till it finally is lost in the boundless raptures of immortality. Oh such a system as this, does indeed seem worthy of the great and glorious Being who is the object of our worship and love; and with the strong claims which it puts forth on our credence and submission, is it any wonder that so very many have been *deluded* into the belief that it is in truth the result of a perfect and unerring wisdom? It may easily be pardoned to ordinary humanity that it receives it as such, and as a necessary result, believes the record of which it forms a part to be indeed the WORD OF GOD.

Mr. Paine treats this subject with that courteousness and "gentle modesty," which every where render his pretensions to the character of a seeker of truth so remarkable. He strives to invalidate scripture prophecy, by describing the prophets as "strolling, conjuring gentry," and the like. But alas, were we to term him a sober and decent controvertialist, our compliments would not blot his name from "The Age of Reason." Homer does not cease to be the author of the Iliad, because some modern Thersites may be pleased to designate him a blind, begging, ballad-singing vagabond. But what should we think of a critic, who would gravely found a series of objections to the glorious epic of "Achilles' anger," on an accumulation of such epithets? Calling names is, to some minds, a very congenial and con-

venient method of argumentation, but eventually it must go for nothing.

The assertion that the so called prophecies were written after the events to which they are said to refer, is rather more in point, and certainly does infinite credit to the discrimination of its authors. The man who could affirm that Chaucer, Cowley, and Byron were poets of the same age and character, is quite as well qualified to write criticisms on English poetry, as he to argue on the authority of the Bible, who supposes the books ascribed respectively to Moses, Ezra, and Paul, not to have been written at periods very remote from each other, and by persons of exceedingly different condition and habits. And yet this is the amount of the assertion now under consideration. Not however, to lay any stress on an argument, the force of which is not generally felt, the infidel objection in question, must suppose a collusion of Jews, Samaritans, and Christians, as shown in the case of scripture miracles ; since the Jew and the Samaritan acknowledge the divinity of the Pentateuch and its prophecies, while the Jew and the Christian admit the inspiration of the entire Old Testament canon. Such a fraud could therefore have been effected only by the united knavery of these three distinct and hostile parties. In its concoction, it must have been agreed on the one hand, that the Samaritan should retain and uphold the Pentateuch alone, while the Jew and the Christian received the whole of the Old Testament

prophecies; and on the other, that the Samaritan and the Christian¹ should make common cause against rabbinical tradition, while the Jew strenuously maintained it as only second, and in some cases, practically superior to the canonical books.

Again; the Jew and the Christian are irreconcilably at variance, as to the meaning of by far the most important part of the predictions of the Old Testament. These scriptures abound with representations of the character, offices, mission, and glory of an illustrious personage, who was subsequently to be employed as a divine messenger to the Jewish nation, and to the world. Christians affirm that this person was the founder of their own faith; and he indeed is the only individual who has ever yet made any successful pretensions to the character. These pretensions were put forth in the centre of the Jewish polity, and the persons first employed to propagate them, were members of the Jewish commonwealth. From a large proportion of their countrymen, the Messiahship of Jesus met with the most decided opposition; and a hatred to his name and claims, has been inflexibly maintained by the Jews at large, down to our own times. It must therefore have been arranged, as part of the trick by which the world has been imposed upon, that there should be all this sham fighting about Jesus of Nazareth; and while the Jew allowed the Chris-

¹ And, it may be added, the Karaite Jew; who is equally the opponent of rabbinical tradition.

tian to model the prophetic scripture so as to tally with the person, character, and circumstances of his prophet, as stated in the New Testament, the Christian, on the other hand, must have engaged to permit the Jew to pour all conceivable contempt on his labours and pretensions, and to brand him as an impostor, blasphemer, and malefactor. As a set off, the character of the Jews given in the prophetic scriptures, is the most degrading that can well be imagined. Descriptions of their most obtuse stupidity, their most abject prostration of morals, and their most loathsome sensuality and vice, abound in these writings. Their national dishonour, their dispersion all over the earth, the scorn with which all nations should assail them, and the oppression and sorrow to which they should be subjected for a long succession of ages, are described in the most forcible and graphic terms. To make amends for all this, they have merely a set of futile promises of future restoration and glory, which never have been fulfilled, and of course, the infidel being judge, never will. On the other hand, the person, character, labours and sufferings of the founder of Christianity are accurately and affectingly described: all the shame and outrage which he is represented as having to endure, only add to the disgrace of his persecutors; while his virtues and general moral accomplishments, the dignity of his commission, and the splendours of its achievement, belong solely to the Christian.

Even those passages of prophetic scripture, which at first sight seem to favour the descendants of the Jewish party of conspirators, are capable of an interpretation which still more illustriously honours their Christian associates in imposture. To his share of the imposition therefore, the Jew has no conceivable motive: and still less has the Christian; since, after all, he has by far the worst part of this unparalleled bargain; inasmuch as the evils he must have agreed to accept from his accomplice, such as persecution, torture, shame, and death, are worse than an indifferent reputation.

Of course, all the traditions of the temple service at Jerusalem,—all the testimony of contemporary historians, the history of Josephus, and the works of Philo,—the accounts of the Septuagint,—and the statements of the son of Sirach respecting the prophets, with other similar records hitherto believed,—are unworthy of any credit. And since the prophecies could not have been fulfilled, except in the destruction of Jerusalem, and other subsequent events, as will be presently shown,—the date of the Old Testament must be considerably later than the commencement of the Christian æra, and every testimony which goes to place it earlier than the reign of Vespasian, must be utterly untrue. The origin of Judaism and Christianity is rendered the most perplexing of all historical inquiries; and the observances of the professors of each, with their mutual opposi-

tion, are altogether unaccountable and ridiculous.

Behold then the facts of this marvellous, this preterhuman compact!—Two classes of men, comprising an innumerable multitude of individuals, unite to deceive the world, without the slightest wish, or hope, or prospect of personal profit. They agree, without any sort of motive or reason, to do all they can to injure each other, and to maintain and inculcate on their posterity, a spirit of reciprocal and interminable hostility. The one covenants to give up personal and national reputation, and the other, home, friends, ease, and life itself; though their scheme of imposture would have as great probability of success without any such sacrifices. This desperate agreement is actually carried into effect; and each in his turn submits to these injuries from the hand of his associate, while both perfectly and successfully shun every semblance of correspondence or agreement, and are held by the world as most inveterately hostile to each other in sentiment, purpose, and desire!

Another method of disposing of scripture prophecies, is the assertion that they are mere conjectures, with which it *happened* that subsequent events corresponded. To illustrate this opinion, suppose a building to have been erected, under the direction of different architects, who lived at periods very remote from each other:—suppose it not only to comprise every hitherto known order of architecture, but also to display

some features peculiarly its own; so that after the additions and alterations of many successive ages, it becomes altogether an object *sui generis*. When it is completed, it is discovered that, before its commencement, there existed numerous copies of a plan, with which it perfectly corresponds, even to its minutest details;—to every one who considered the subject, it would be morally certain, that this correspondence was the result of fixed design. Some one however, affecting to be wiser than his neighbours, says, “there is no proof of any connexion between this plan and the building before us. Among the innumerable forms which matter is capable of assuming, the probability is, that each person employed in this erection, followed the bent of his own taste, and the result is what you see, which *happens* to correspond with the plan which was drawn up before the building was contemplated. Indeed I have no doubt that this is the fact; and so fully am I convinced of it, that I esteem every one who thinks otherwise, a fit subject not for argument but for ridicule.”

Such a scepticism, monstrous as it would be universally deemed, would not be so irrational as the opinion that the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments have been fulfilled by mere casualty, since their correspondence with subsequent events, involved, not only the infinite combinations of matter, but likewise the vast varieties of events and manners in many ages, and the incalculable and changing forms of motive and

feeling in countless multitudes, each forming a part of a great whole, and concurring with the rest, in the most perfect harmony, for the consummation of some one important purpose. Every one is aware on how insignificant circumstances depend the results of the most important undertakings. The delay or the precipitation of a minute,—a shower of rain, or a gust of wind,—preferring one road to another, equally near to the same place,—a single word dropped in the most cursory or thoughtless manner,—the breaking of a thread,—a slip of the foot,—a headache,—a moments irresolution,—and things, if possible, even less important in themselves, have moulded the destinies of men in this life and beyond the grave. For instance, in respect to the prophecies, had Jesus been betrayed for one piece of silver more or one less than thirty pieces, or had Judas cast away the reward of his treachery, any where but in the temple, or had the field purchased with this money belonged to a person of any profession but a potter, the prophecy of Zechariah¹ had not been fulfilled, and to a certain degree, the whole prophetic scriptures had thus been invalidated. To the accomplishment of each of these events, there necessarily concurred innumerable circumstances with which we are unacquainted, the failure of the least of which had probably disarranged all the rest, and against each therefore there were an incalculable number

1, ch. xi. ver. 12, 13.

of probabilities. If then we proceed to argue in a similar manner upon every individual prophecy, to the fulfilment of which we have abundant testimony, the chances against the whole are such, that it is all but a contradiction in terms, to assert that their accomplishment is merely accidental.

In order to illustrate this more fully, we will just allude to a few of such predictions of the Old Testament, as relate, 1. to the Jews, and 2. to the Messiah. As to the first, we shall confine our attention to those contained in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, where Moses declares the results of the Israelites' disobedience to the laws which he prescribed to them.

Nothing can be more evident, than that these passages were not the result of his personal feeling; for never was there a patriotic attachment, more devoted than that of Moses to the children of Israel. For them, he sacrificed prospects of the highest worldly honour; for them, he renounced the pleasant retirement of domestic life; for them, he exposed himself to the wrath of the king of Egypt. It was his intercession that stayed the hand of God's justice when raised to punish their crimes. His life he offered in their stead to an offended God. To him, no sacrifice seemed too great; no danger too hazardous, no endurance too painful, to subserve their happiness. In spite of their frequent expressions of ingratitude, their murmurings, and rebellions, he maintained his interest in their welfare, and

sought no reward for his labour, and anxiety, and sorrow, but their prosperity and glory. It may easily be conceived then, how painfully opposed to his own feelings, were these announcements of such heavy calamity, upon a people to whom he was so tenderly attached.

Nor on the other hand, were the probabilities of the case at all in favour of such prophecies. Many of the laws which he proclaimed, were likely to promote the prosperity of the children of Israel, only on the supposition, that they were of divine authority, which of course the infidel will not admit. In fact some of them appear calculated to produce a contrary result:—such as the command, that all the males should appear in Jerusalem, three times a year, by which the whole country would for the time, be left defenceless; and that every seventh year, the land should be allowed to remain wholly uncultivated, with several others. Idolatry itself, the highest treason of the Mosaic law, does not necessarily induce national decay, since it is by no means incompatible with those qualities, which according to ordinary calculation, are the strength and defence of a state. On the whole, the probability was, that the *observance* of the laws given by Moses rather than the *neglect* of them, would be injurious to the Israelites. His predictions of these terrible calamities therefore, must have been directly opposed at once, by all the feelings of his heart, and all the dictates of his judgment.

In the chapter to which we have referred above, Moses declares that the enemies of the Jews should come from a distance;—that their movement should be that of the eagle;—and that their language should be unknown; (ver. 49.)—that they should be a people of fierce countenance, and should commit undistinguishing slaughter; (ver. 50.)—that the Jews should suffer distress by siege and famine, so dreadful and long continued, as to destroy even natural affection, and that parents should literally feed on the flesh of their own offspring; (ver. 53. &c.)—that they should be taken down into Egypt for slaves, and that in consequence of the number exported at one time, they should not meet with purchasers; (ver. 68.)—that they should be rooted out from their own land; (ver. 63.) and dispersed over all the kingdoms of the earth; (ver. 64.)—that they should find no resting place; (ver. 65.)—that they should be continually oppressed and spoiled; (ver. 29.)—that their sons and daughters should be given to another people;—that they should serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither they nor their ancestors had known; (ver. 36, 64.)—that their calamities should drive them to desperation; (ver. 34.)—that they should become “an astonishment, a proverb and a byeword among all nations,” (ver. 37.) and in fine, that their afflictions should be wonderful and should continue for many ages. (ver. 59.)

Now for the facts.¹ The description of the enemies of the Jews given above, accurately corresponds with the character and conduct of the Romans. Vespasian and Hadrian, the two great conquerors of the Jews, came from Britain to the Jewish war. The eagle was the military ensign and apt symbol of the Roman armies, both from the overwhelming rush of their attack, and the rapidity of their conquests. The latin tongue was made familiar to the Jews only by intercourse with their conquerors. Josephus relates that in Gadara, Jotapata, Gamala, and other cities, the Romans under Vespasian, had no respect to any age, and that in the last named place, they did not spare even the women and the infants, so that of all the inhabitants, only two women succeeded in concealing themselves from their fury;—that in the siege of Jerusalem, if so much as the shadow of food appeared, the dearest friends fought for it and snatched it from each other's mouths,—wives from their husbands, children from their fathers, and mothers from their infants. He adds the account of a woman of noble birth, who had been deprived of all her substance, who killed and ate her own sucking child. The calamities of that unhappy city were such, that those who lived desired to die, and the dead were only esteemed happy. A million and a quarter fell during the siege, and at the taking of the city,

1. The reader will find the fulfilment of these prophecies, treated of at large in Bp. Newton's viith dissertation. The above is merely an epitome of some of his statements.

besides nearly a hundred thousand made prisoners. The captives above seventeen years of age were sent into Egypt, and of these so little care was taken, that eleven thousand perished for want. The rest were sold, as well as thousands of others by Hadrian; and the slave markets were so glutted with captive Jews, that many of them remained unsold, and it was only at the lowest prices that any purchasers were found. The last named emperor forbade all Jews on pain of death to set foot in Jerusalem, or even the country about it. From that time, they have been dispersed all over the world, and are now to be found in every part of it;—they have endured the most gross oppression and robbery, and in several countries, their children have been taken from them by order of the state, to be educated in popery. In innumerable cases, they themselves have joined in the idolatries of popish countries, so that at one time, the priesthood of Spain, nay the inquisition itself, was almost entirely filled by Jews. It is no marvel that amidst these calamities, they have been the most desperate of all people, and their rage has occasionally burst forth in the most terrific manner. Spite of the influence of Christianity, which in recent times has somewhat mitigated their treatment, they are still a proverb in the earth. When Shakspeare would depict a Jew, he drew Shylock. Other nations whose civil polity has been destroyed, have soon mingled with the people into whose lands they have been

transferred, but the Jews, after undergoing unparalleled hardships and cruelties, for more than seventeen hundred years, are still a separate people in all parts of the world, preserving the same physiognomy, the same traditions, and the same expectations; and yet possessing none of the ordinary bonds of social and political union, either of language, country, or civil law.

Of Christ, it was prophesied, that he should be of the family of David, the son of Jesse;¹—that his mother should be a virgin;²—that he should be born in Bethlehem;³—that he should be generally ill-treated⁴—that he should be put to death four hundred and ninety years after the edict of Artaxerxes Longimanus for rebuilding the Jewish temple;⁵—that at his death, his garments should be divided by some of his persecutors, and that for his vesture, they should cast lots;⁶—that not one of his bones should be broken;⁷—and that he should be buried in the sepulchre of a rich man.⁸ In these, and many other particulars, the history of Jesus of Nazareth, was perfectly coin-

1. Compare Isa. xi. 1, *et seq.* 2 Sam. vii. 12—15. Ps. lxxxix. 19—37. with Matt. i. 1—16. Luke, i. 27, 32.

2. Compare Isa. vii. 14. with Matt. i. 22, 23. *et al.*

3. Compare Micah, v. 2. with Matt. ii. 1—6. Luke, ii. 4—7.

4. Compare Isa. liii. with the whole gospel history.

5. Dan. ix. 24. Prideaux's Connections, pt. i. b. 5.

6. Compare Ps. xxii. 18. with Matt. xxii. 35.

7. Compare Exod. xii. 45. Numb. ix. 12. with John, xxi. 31—36.

8. Compare Isa. liii. 9. with Matt. xxvii. 38—60.

cident with the predictions which described it.

These events, as well as the desolation of Nineveh and Babylon, the degradation of Egypt and Tyre, the succession of the four great monarchies, and all the other facts of which the prophetic scriptures make ample and unambiguous statements, the infidel believes to have been conjectured. But this does not extricate him from his difficulties. That a number of men,—of different nations,—in a succession of several thousand years,—each independant of the rest, should—in the teeth of all probability,—successfully and without a single error,—have conjectured the accumulation of facts contained in Old Testament prophecy;—and that the record of these conjectures should have been preserved,—in one volume,—with the utmost jealousy and reverence,—by the people most interested in suppressing them,—for ages beyond the occurrence of the events to which they alluded,—is a prodigy beyond parallel in the history of the world;—a prodigy including in itself, a series of miracles, each of which, is sufficient to give the Bible an authority possessed by no other book under heaven.

Indeed as it is morally impossible, that the correspondence between the predictions of scripture and subsequent events, should be the result of mere casualty, the assertion that the prophecies were only conjectures, is of disservice rather than of advantage to the cause of infidelity. The

ability to conjecture, with unerring accuracy, what shall occur at the distance of several thousand years, implies a wisdom far beyond what we believe the prophets to have possessed. All that we contend for in their behalf, is that God revealed to them certain future events, the record of which has been handed down to us. Further than this, we do not suppose their minds necessarily superior to those of other men; nor do we imagine that they had any knowledge of the circumstances which were to intervene between their own and those times of which they prophesied. The infidel necessarily admits them to have been beings of an intellect infinitely surpassing the rest of mankind,—to have traced a series of causes and effects for ages beyond the periods in which they themselves lived,—to have distinctly anticipated the characters of millions of men then unborn,—to have entered fully into the intricacies of their motives and feelings, and ascertained all their possible varieties,—to have correctly calculated on all the tendencies of accident, irregularity, or eccentricity,—in short to have been able to judge accurately of all conceivable combinations of matter and mind, with the innumerable results of each, and to have decided on their respective probabilities; so that after the lapse of many generations, their miraculous discernment is vindicated by the events themselves; some of which are so minute, and others so little to be anticipated, that he who, with a perfect personal knowledge of their agents,

had predicted them twenty-four hours before their actual occurrence, might well have been deemed possessed of sources of knowledge not open to his fellow men. Such an ability we believe to belong only to the Infinite and Omniscient. But we will not contend with the unbeliever who deems the prophets to have possessed it, since he admits the authority of the prophetic scriptures as even more clear and incontestible than we had supposed it. He who asserts the prophecies to have been conjectures, instead of invalidating their testimony to the divinity of the Bible, renders it tenfold stronger than it could be, under any other supposition.

We will not ask the infidel to assign a distinct motive to each of the prophets,—which from the evident variety of their characters, circumstances, and writings, we have ample right to demand ;—but let him tell us, in general only, why, unless they were under a divine impulse, they wrote or spoke as they did. All the motives by which men are usually impelled, are out of the question in their case. It was not to display their own sagacity, for the events which they foretold were most of them very remote. It was not for personal emolument. Priestcraft is a term of frequent recurrence in the infidel's argumentation, and it no doubt is a very pleasant subject for sarcasm and abuse, but prophet-craft alas, presents no opportunities for exposing the mercenary temper of believers in the Bible. Nor were the prophets

animated by the hope of popular applause,—for they had to denounce the vices of the people, in no measured terms ;—to “ smite with *the* hand and stamp with *the* foot, and say, alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel : ”¹ nor by patriotic feeling, for it was their employment to proclaim the disgrace and ruin of their country. Neither honour, ease, wealth, nor fame, could have been their inducement ;—neither personal feeling, nor desire for national glory. Such was their treatment from their countrymen, that Jesus Christ described Jerusalem in those words of emphasis,—“ thou that killest the prophets ; ”—and the apostle Paul,—a Jew, and of course neither unacquainted with the facts, nor likely to state what would dishonour his race, says,—“ they were stoned, they were sawn asunder,—were slain with the sword ; they wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins,—in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”² Every motive of human nature would have disposed them either to have been silent, or at least to have prophesied in a style widely different from that which they actually assumed ; and hence we find some of them naturally enough, engaging in their prophetic employment with great reluctance. Infidelity therefore, is not only inconsistent with all the probabilities of events, but utterly opposed to human nature, and—till men are capable of

1. Ezekel vi. 11.—2. Heb. xi. 37, 38.

coveting pain, persecution, and death,—*is* false, and *must be* ridiculous.

Nor is it less opposed and dishonourable to what is called natural religion, of which the infidel affects to be so greatly enamoured. The Bible is the only book which claims the evidence of inspiration derivable from prophecy,—a species of evidence, which possesses the peculiarity of increasing in value, by the lapse of time. This claim is so plausibly made out, as to have won the belief of multitudes of wise and virtuous men. Nothing could have been more easy to God, than by a single intervention of his providence, to have in an instant, destroyed such a delusion, and for ever have prevented its recurrence; nor could any act have been more consistent with his attributes, or more likely to promote his glory, and the happiness of men. On the contrary, he has allowed a system of falsehood to proceed from age to age, accumulating every evidence which the most ardent admirer of deceit and wickedness could desire. He has permitted thousands of his rational creatures, who above all things sought to know the truth and to do his will, to sacrifice, under this deception, all that men ordinarily hold dear and valuable, and ultimately to lay down their lives rather than their faith. Such is the character which infidelity attributes to the Just, the True, and the Holy One. It teaches us to believe, that He who made us is utterly careless of our welfare, and utterly regard-

less of his own honour,—that the prosperity of falsehood is more acceptable to Him than the spread of truth ; and that, on the most important subject, to which the faith of man can be invited, or by which his expectations may be elicited, He has practically dishonoured benevolence, justice, and purity !

Having now illustrated the nature of infidel objections to the two leading evidences of the divinity of Christianity, we shall proceed to inquire more fully into what the preceding chapter has already suggested,—the character which infidelity attributes to the writers of the Bible, or rather, the conclusions upon this subject to which it necessarily leads.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONCLUSIONS OF INFIDELITY AS TO SCRIPTURE
CHARACTERS.

If the Bible be untrue, its authors were impostors.—Moses could not have been deceived in what he relates—nor Christ, in the prediction of his resurrection—nor the apostles, in their supposed witness of it.—The imposture of the apostles on an important subject—dishonourable to God—differing from other religious frauds—productive of evil to themselves—and multitudes of others—maintained in profound secrecy, by an immense number of persons—no suspicion of it now among professing Christians—conducted in the most imprudent manner—and crowned with the most splendid success.—Christ and his apostles transcendently wicked men—yet they preached the purest doctrines—led exemplary lives—died heroically—and were the most perfect self-contradictions.—Extract from the Edinburgh Encyclopedia.—Sketch of the life and character of the apostle Paul.

IF the Bible be untrue, its authors were either impostors, or themselves grossly imposed upon. Could it be proved that they were men of very weak, or excitable and enthusiastic minds, it would certainly afford a strong suspicion, that they might possibly have been themselves the subjects of delusion. Equally would this be the

case, could it be shown, that their prejudices were in favour of the doctrines which they promulgated. But if it can be rendered manifest, that they were distinguished by sobriety of observation and judgment, and that all their prepossessions were decidedly hostile to that order of things to which they subsequently attached themselves;—if above all, it is evident, that in some of the facts which they relate, they could not, from the nature of things, have been deceived,—it will be morally certain,—according to the infidel's judgment,—that they were impostors, and impostors too, deserving no ordinary infamy.

We will first notice the character of Moses, as he is the most prominent of the writers of the Old Testament. We readily concede, that he was a person of poetical temperament and power, but it does not follow that he was destitute of any of those qualities, which render a man, either a cool and correct observer, or an accurate and unexaggerating historian. If we consider his education, and the prospects of his youth, it will be sufficiently apparent, that he was far more likely to have cultivated the friendship of the Egyptian court, than to seek the troublesome, and far from honourable office of leader of a band of slaves. The accomplished scholar would not be ambitious of the association of rude and uncultured men; and the heir presumptive to the throne of Egypt, was not, according to human judgment, the person that would voluntarily place himself in a

posture of decided opposition to the monarch in whose throne he had the prospect of being seated. To connect himself therefore with the interests of the people of Israel, was an act contrary to all his probable prepossessions and habits. Nothing too, can be more obvious, than his unwillingness to take such a step. Every apology which he could devise was employed to excuse himself; and when each was met and answered, his reluctance, far from being overcome, assumed as nearly the shape of a positive refusal, as his reverence for God would allow.¹

It would have been natural enough, for a person in the responsible situation occupied by Moses, to have represented the people whom he governed and led, in glowing colours; and to have spoken highly of their origin, and their general character for heroism and virtue. Let any one read the records of Xenophon, Cæsar, and others, both ancient and modern, in illustration and proof of this sentiment. Had Moses been a weak man, or an enthusiast, nothing less than the most exalted encomiums on himself and the Israelites, would have been in character. Now what is the fact? Their father, he says, was "a Syrian ready to perish."² He details the instances of their ingratitude, perfidy, cowardice, and idolatry, without the slightest attempt to mitigate the harshness of the picture; and in fine, pronounces them a stiff-necked and rebellious

1. Exod. iv. 13.—2. Deut. xxvi. 5.

nation. With equal artlessness and simplicity, he relates his own diffidence, slowness of speech, anger, distrust of God, and exclusion from the promised country of Canaan. The misconduct of his brother and sister, with the peculiar disgrace of the latter, are not in the least extenuated. He speaks of the passing of the priesthood from his own family to that of Aaron, and the appointment of his servant, instead of his son, as his successor in the command of the host of Israel.¹ The word "meek," applied to himself,² is the only apparent exception to this sort of behaviour; but the original meaning of the Hebrew word so rendered in the authorized version, is *afflicted* or *oppressed*, as the same root is frequently translated elsewhere.³

Besides, supposing all this reasoning inconclusive, there are some events in the history of Moses, as related in the Bible, in which he could not have been deceived. The plagues of Egypt, —the parting of the Red Sea,—the manna,—the smiting of the rock, and the flowing of its stream, following the course of the wanderings of Israel, —the scenes at Sinai, and several other incidents,

1. Similar candour distinguishes all the writers of the Bible. Nothing can be more remote from the encomiastic bombast of enthusiasm than the calm and humble style, in which they detail their own faults, and the faults of those for whose reputation they would naturally be most interested.

2. Num. xiii. 3.

3. From אָנָה (*anah*) "he was afflicted," as for instance, it is found, Isa. liii. 7.—CASTELL AND PARKHURST, *sub voce*.

are matters in which delusion was impossible. If therefore the Bible be untrue, Moses must have been fully aware of the falsehood of that part of which he was author :—he must have been an impostor, and of consequence, a wicked man.

It would be tedious to go into detail, respecting each of the writers of the Bible, nor is it necessary, since the conclusions to which we come as to Moses, Jesus Christ, and his apostles, will be sufficient to authorize or repudiate all other scripture writers. If they were impostors, it is useless to pursue the argument in behalf of the others; and if they were divinely inspired, the rest are proved to have been so, by the same reasoning. Of the character and lives of Christ and his apostles, it is not requisite to go into any discursive survey. As the entire argument for the truth of Christianity is made to depend on the resurrection of Christ, it is only needful for us to inquire, whether this was an event, by the expectation of which Christ could have been deceived; and in the supposed witness of which, his disciples could have been deceived. That Christ did predict his resurrection, is sufficiently obvious from the acknowledgment of the chief priests and pharisees.¹ Every sane man must have known whether he made such a prediction in good faith. Is there then any thing in the history of Christ, contrary to the most perfect sanity? Much of his character is undoubtedly mysterious, but in

1. Matt. xxvii. 62—66.

this there is nothing peculiar, since the conduct of every Christian man, to the rejector of the Bible, must appear more or less so, at all times, in which both are consistent with their own professions. Beyond this, there is nothing, either in the teaching, or prophecies, or labours of Christ, inconsistent with the soundest and highest sobriety. If therefore his own prophecies of his resurrection were false, he must have fully understood them to have been so; and he therefore, equally with Moses, was an impostor.

On the other hand, the disciples of Christ affirm that they saw him alive after he had been murdered; that they conversed with him familiarly; that they handled him with their hands; that he ate in their presence; that they observed the marks of the cruel death which he died; that he made the most distinct allusion to certain events which transpired before his crucifixion, to which they were jointly privy; that he gave them directions as to their subsequent conduct; and that finally, he ascended up into a cloud out of their sight. No *one* man of healthy sense and pulse, could have been deceived in such a series of events; and the witnesses of the resurrection were more than five hundred persons, each of whom, we have every reason to believe perfectly able to judge correctly on such a subject.

Besides, there was no predisposition of mind which could have assisted any thing of delusion. Upon the apprehension of their master, all his

disciples forsook him and fled. After his death, they appear to have yielded to hopeless despondency. They were confounded and oppressed with fear and grief. All their bright dreams of the future glory of their master's kingdom had vanished, and they clung to each other, more probably, because they were partners in sorrow and shame, than on any other account. No one took upon him to harangue the others, and excite their enthusiasm and hope; and in short, they were fully prepared to disbelieve the alleged fact of the resurrection. Nor was it till evidence had been accumulated on evidence, till personal examination had been added to testimony, till indeed they could resist no longer, that the disciples admitted that Christ was risen. They could not have been deceived. If therefore their testimony be untrue, there can be no doubt that they also were impostors. It is to their share in the arrangement and propagation of the fable of the New Testament, that the following remarks will be principally applicable.

Some impostures are so unimportant, that few persons will take any considerable pains to detect them; and when they are detected, they excite nothing but a momentary contempt. The case before us is, however, widely different. The question, whether the New Testament be true, is of the last importance to every human being; since it involves propositions which no power of natural sagacity could ever have suggested as

essential to religion, and proposes terms for man's present and eternal welfare, which, while they are exclusively its own, are insisted on as the only ones on which that welfare can be secured. For any man or any number of men to invent such conditions, to affix the divine name and authority to them, and to limit salvation to those who embrace them, is an extreme of arrogant and treasonable presumption, against the majesty and mercy of God. Such was the conduct of the apostles. They published what they knew to be a gross untruth; they represented the Almighty as having confirmed, by the greatest of all miracles, the claims of an impostor and blasphemer: a belief in the fact of this miracle they made necessary to salvation, and all who refused credence to it, they placed under the sentence of eternal condemnation. Thus did they deliberately rob God of his proper honour, and gave it to one who had been justly crucified as a malefactor; and by this daring impiety, they placed themselves beyond the scope of ordinary fraud. All this they did at once, and herein they differed from all other pretenders to divine authority. From the character of timid, simple, and uneducated fishermen, they at one bound, attained that of the most fearless and successful impostors. There was no previous training, no long seclusion of themselves from society, to warm their enthusiasm by reveries, to calculate chances, to arrange doctrines, to conjecture results, or to

nerve themselves against pain and shame. They rose without any intermediate steps, from one extreme of character and conduct to the opposite extreme; and a similarly magical and marvellous transformation took place simultaneously, upon several hundred other persons. The fraud sprang forth in perfect maturity and armour of proof, to startle and confound, to triumph and endure.

A thousand crimes are connived at in a victorious monarch, who hopes through them, for perpetuity to his throne, or increase to his fame. The delinquencies by which a man arrives at great wealth, are not usually very severely scrutinized. We understand the motives of all sensual sins. The luxury of the epicure, and the license of the voluptuary, however we may condemn them, do not greatly surprise us. The well known power of depraved appetite, especially if combined with the force of habit, affords a sort of palliation for these and similar vices. Now, although there are no means, by which the first promulgators of the falsehoods of Christianity, can be exonerated from the charge of the grossest impiety, yet their crime may be deprived of its monstrous and unnatural character, if we can find in human nature, any motive sufficiently powerful to account for it. If not, we are driven to the conclusion, that they had arrived at the unparalleled depravity, which affronts the majesty of the Omnipotent, merely for the delight of braving his most terrible judgments, both in this and a future world. I will

not say that they had no motive, sufficiently powerful to impel men of ordinary wickedness, but I will go farther; I will venture to affirm, that they had no motive at all. Distinctly and repeatedly, did their master teach them, that to the engagement into which they were about to enter, they must sacrifice every human desire and affection. They were assured by him, that they must abandon every thing dear that this world contained; that they must yield up their property, ease, friends, reputation, and lives; that they must break all ties of human love; that they must renounce all hope, except that of pain, shame, sorrow, and death; that they must submit to be counted the vilest, the lowest, the most dishonoured of men; that they must endure from their countrymen, the reproach of apostasy, and by all, be regarded as wretches, whom it would be religion to destroy. His own life of poverty, disgrace, contumely, labour, and privation, was the earnest of a similar lot to themselves. With these expectations, they went forth to proclaim the doctrines, which had brought him to a violent and disgraceful death, and to announce *Him*—the crucified peasant of Galilee,—as the Saviour and Lord,—alike of the Jew, who had shed his blood, and of the Greek, who ridiculed his character, teaching, and death. No scheme could have been more inartificial; no enterprize more hopeless or hazardous. Nor were they disappointed of the treatment which they anticipated. They

had to sacrifice their property, to renounce ease and inclination, to abandon their country, to subject themselves to all conceivable labour, to submit to the infuriated malignity of the Jew, and the cold, subtle, deadly ridicule of the Greek; and finally, having defied the ingenuity of the fiercest cruelty, they unhesitatingly laid down their lives, and all for what they knew to be utterly false and without foundation!

When the evil consequences of a system of fraud affect only its authors, though we do not deem their sufferings worthy of our commiseration, yet if those sufferings be very severe, we are disposed to admit them as a sort of expiation of their guilt. But if any such scheme should be so arranged, as to impose upon multitudes of other persons, who have never done its authors any injury,—if it be its avowed object, to induce such unoffending individuals to make every sacrifice, under the influence of hopes which never can be realized;—if it be proclaimed to them, with the certainty that it can lead to no other results, than personal sorrow or confiscation, shame or death,—exile or violence to their wives and children, and infamy to all connected with them,—what name can be found, of sufficient intensity and expression, to describe the monstrous wickedness which thus,—without any conceivable motive, involved countless multitudes virtuous men, in such a train of frightful evils?

w I ask, should we characterize the atrocity

which could, at such a price, and with such results,—results unavoidable and understood,—propagate any system of falsehood? Such enormous outrage on humanity, has never been witnessed, except in the conduct of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Supposing Christianity to be false, and they must have known it to have been so, they, and they only, of all the sinners recorded in the long and damning history of man's vice, have attained this supremacy of surpassing and unparalleled villany. Theirs indeed was wickedness for the pure love of wickedness; malice without motive, nay, a malice so powerful, as to triumph over all ordinary motive. To this hatred of all goodness, this diabolical abhorrence of the happiness of their species, all common feelings succumbed at once and for ever. The love of pleasure, property, reputation, country, kindred—all, all were too weak to prevent these men from labouring, at the loss of all, to make others wretched. The joy of doing mischief was too mighty to be controlled:—it raised them above all the accumulated calamities of their lives; made the most fearful forms of death pleasant, and in this temper, they entered the presence of their Maker, almost before the last sounds of their falsehood had ceased to quiver on their tongues, or vibrate on the ears of the spectators of their execution.

It is true, they told their deluded followers a place of happiness, which should reward their toils and sufferings, when this life of sorrow

terminated. They promised them crowns of unfading light, mansions of beatific splendour, and kingdoms of extensive glory, where rivers of sparkling purity and perfect coolness, and trees of everlasting blossom and unfailing fruit, invited repose, and supplied refreshment, through an immortality of youth and music. This might have won upon the faith and desire of some, and been to them a sufficiently powerful motive. No doubt indeed that it was so; but to the original promulgators of the system, this invention could of course have no charm, particularly as *those who loved and made a lie*—how descriptive of themselves!—were specifically excluded from the state of happiness which they thus described. Even could it therefore for a moment be supposed, that they had themselves any shadow of faith in it, they did in fact pronounce upon their spirits, the just judgment of exclusion and perdition hereafter, for all their present gratuitous and disinterested atrocities.

What renders these transactions yet more remarkable, is the mutual fidelity of the parties concerned in them. One might reasonably have supposed, where there was so total an absence of all moral principle, that no bond could have been found sufficiently strong, to have held them in faithful concealment of their joint fraud; especially as those to whom the plot must in the first place have been committed, could not have been less than five hundred persons. Not only was it

digested so perfectly by this multitude, as to induce entire harmony in their distinct narratives and ethics, but, although there was every inducement of a worldly nature, to expose the falsehood, of which each must have been perfectly sensible, there never was found one, with so much remaining goodness, as to throw out the slightest hint of the real posture of affairs.

Still further, no inconsiderable portion of those who made a profession of Christianity during the apostolic age, must have been let into the secret, since otherwise, it is impossible but that there would have been some contradiction of the histories of miracles, said to have been wrought at that time. Hence the apostle Paul writes with the utmost gravity to the Christians resident in Corinth, and tells them that some of them were well known to possess certain miraculous powers; such as the ability to heal diseases which were incurable by mere human means, to speak in languages which they had never learned, and the like; and he directs them how to use these gifts for the advantage of the cause they had espoused. Of course, the whole of the persons to whom this letter was addressed, must have fully known, that they had no such powers, and they must have been distinctly conscious, that the only reason why the writer told these falsehoods, was to give a greater plausibility to the system of fraud which he was engaged in propagating. Nothing too could have been more

obvious to them, than that by being silent, under such circumstances, they became most efficient auxiliaries to his nefarious design. How long the knowledge of the imposture of Christianity was handed down, it is at this remote period, impossible to say, but from the foregoing reasoning, most certain it is, that it must have travelled into many lands, and been committed to hundreds of thousands of men. Yet so fully was the integrity of all these persons debauched, by the deadly influence of the system to which they had attached themselves, that not one person of this countless number, ever betrayed the terms of the mysteriously wicked league into which they had entered.

One of the most extraordinary facts connected with the case is, that for many ages, the suspicion of any thing like fraud, connected with the New Testament, has entirely vanished from among the professors of its faith. And yet, with the most perfect conviction of its truth, they are not found, in the present day, so prepared to sacrifice and labour in its behalf, as its first preachers, who had the most accurate knowledge of its falsehood. Truth over us, it must be admitted, exerts no such influence, as falsehood did over them. Our minds have no such reverence for what we esteem the most perfect counsel of God, as theirs had, for what they knew to be the inventions of their own wicked hearts. Nor need we wonder at this, since

human nature seventeen hundred years ago, must, according to the infidel, have been the opposite of what we find it in our own times. The being who loves vice, shame, poverty, reproach and torture, for their own sake, is not a man, according to the characteristics of humanity known among us. He has no feelings in common with human nature, or with any other beings with whom we are at all acquainted, or of whom we can form any conception.

An ordinary prudence in the conduct of a system of imposture, would induce its advocates to seek those places and people, where there would be the fewest facilities for detection. If they related inventions of their own, as true histories, it would naturally be at the greatest distance from the places, where they alleged such events to have transpired, and they would place the era of their occurrence at as remote a period as possible. Common discretion would instruct them to attempt to impose, only, or at least in the first place, on the credulous and uneducated, and such in general as were least skilled in the investigation of truth. They would shun the walks of science and philosophy, and would associate with those, whose habits or superstitions might seem in some degree favourable to their projects. All inquiry, particularly judicial inquiry, they would carefully avoid; they would labour to inflame the passions, rather than to enlighten the judgment, and seek to extend the influence of their

conspiracy, rather by insinuation than by any thing of bold public effrontery. Among contending parties, it would be their wisdom to coalesce with the strongest, or if this were not possible, to make the weakest submit to them. A system of falsehood must, more or less, tend to disorganization, and they would naturally take advantage of political or social broils and revolutions, to promote their own wicked designs. They would strive to adapt their system to the manners of those whom they wished to deceive; what was likely to be offensive, they would throw into the shade, if not entirely conceal, and what seemed peculiarly consonant to the views and vices of those whom they taught, they would render prominent and impressive. They would invent a variety of subterfuges in cases of assault and persecution, and in short, would accomodate their teaching and their conduct, as fully as possible, to all conceivable circumstances and occasions.

Now what was the actual conduct of the first promulgators of Christianity? Why, as if they would defy all the rules, by which a common system of falsehood would be guided;—in the teeth of all experience, of all prudence and discretion, they pursued the very opposite course, in every respect. The fable of the resurrection of Christ, they proclaimed, first of all in Jerusalem, where the fact was said to have occurred; and that too without any delay. They preached in the presence of those who were, of all others,

best able and most interested to detect their imposture. They stood before the Jewish rulers, and accused them of the murder of Jesus of Nazareth; and so extraordinary was their audacity, that the rulers quailed under the accusation, and had not the nerve even to contradict the falsehoods. Not satisfied with this, they visited all the seats of science and philosophy, all the abodes of Gentile splendour and art, and all the haunts of the heathen mythology. They dared the inquisition, alike of the Jewish sanhedrim, and the Grecian areopagus: they encountered the licentiousness and wealth of Corinth, they assailed the hierarchy of Apollo at Antioch, and proclaimed their obnoxious doctrines before the temple of the Ephesian Diana. They penetrated the deserts of Scythia; wandered among the barbarians of Gaul, Britain, and Germany, and braved the heats of Lybia and India. As far as ancient navigation had extended, they radiated, from the centre of civilization and the arts; and having established their faith in the eternal city itself, they spread abroad their bands beyond the utmost limit of the Roman empire. No city, however civilized or luxurious; no desert, however horrid, provided only that it afforded refuge to human beings,—nor any known land, however remote, was secure from their attempts.

They founded their teaching on arguments, sufficiently specious to impose, not merely on the poor and ignorant, but also on the refined and

instructed; and we are told, in one case, of one of them, standing a prisoner before a Roman tribunal, who reasoned with such force and feeling, that the judge trembled before his captive, and dismissed him to his prison. They employed every varied method of teaching. Sometimes in private, they showed the things concerning Christ, and at other times, in halls of judicature, and similar places of public resort, they fearlessly declared the falsehoods which they had invented.

They sought the assistance of no party: in fact, they had all parties against them. To their own countrymen, their preaching was most offensive: it dishonoured them as a nation, and prostrated the most cherished pride of the then popular religion. To the Greek, it was absurd. The one cursed, the other scorned them; while the power of the Roman empire was exerted to crush them, because they interfered with the superstitions of the state, and proclaimed the crucified Jesus as their risen king. They taught entire obedience to the established civil authorities, shunned all association with political changes, and passed through them with the most unmoved calmness.

In their doctrine, they were inflexible. No accomodation to circumstances, no mitigation of the evils threatened to unbelievers, appears throughout their history, at any time or under any circumstances: they never shunned to

declare the whole of the system which they had avouched. No man's prejudices were consulted; no man's vices were connived at. Wealth could not buy their indulgence, nor power hush their stern denunciations. They were as uncompromising at the tribunal and at the stake, as when mingled with their own disciples and followers. Their obstinacy in prosecuting their scheme, was as unparalleled and as unaccountable as their wickedness in projecting it. They were men of iron;—men who had no pity for their species, or their own flesh; neither did they count their lives dear unto them, so that they might finish their course of imposture with joy at its progress.

Contrast their conduct and its results, with the conduct of other religious impostors,—Mohammed for example. To adopt, with a slight alteration, the sentiment of the immortal Pascal:—Mohammed established his religion by killing others; the first preachers of Christianity by laying down their own lives. They were so fully opposite in their respective modes of conduct, that if the one took the way, in all human probability, to succeed, the other took the way, humanly speaking, to be disappointed. By the same rule therefore, by which Mohammedanism has succeeded, Christianity, if it be a system of imposture must inevitably have perished.¹

Yet it must not be forgotten that Christianity has met with the most splendid successes. The most

¹ *Thoughts*, p. 197, (Ed. London, 1806.)

uninviting religious invention ever heard of,—that offered poverty to the covetous,—infamy to the ambitious,—disgrace to the reputable,—ridicule to the learned,—exile to the patriot,—toil to the slothful,—abstinence to the sensual,—and suffering and danger, if not martyrdom, to all;—this most uninviting and inartificial of all frauds, was nevertheless the most successful, spite of the sword, the cross, the flame, and scarcely less terrible, the scorn, the ridicule, the bitter hatred of all that were held exalted in philosophy, profound in science, or venerable in religion. It was successful; though its first preachers were neither rhetoricians nor philosophers; neither men of education, influence, refinement, nor knowledge of the world; and though, to the first race of its professors, the secret of its falsehood must have been unreservedly committed. Three hundred years scarcely elapsed, from its first invention to the time when it sat on the throne of the Cæsars, and led by its symbol, the triumphant arms of the Roman legions. Every other system of error had crumbled beneath its touch. Jupiter had given place to Jesus: the eagle and thunderbolt had vanished before the lamb and the cross; and so complete and exterminating was its triumph, that the fables which it superseded, have passed away for ever.

There is, among infidels generally, a reserve in speaking of the characters of Christ and his apostles, which is highly dishonourable to them-

selves and their cause. If they are truly sincere in their professions, why do they not proclaim the actual results of their principles? If they indeed believe Christianity untrue, why do they not with all becoming indignation, expose the execrable wickedness of its first promulgators? They are, in general, very chary in their censures, on this subject. They, forsooth, believe Christ to have been a benevolent man, and his apostles though mistaken, to have on the whole meant well. They have a great reverence for the morality of the Gospel, and think that perhaps Christianity has, in some instances, been of service to mankind! This of course can deceive no one. Were they to speak out, they well know that they should excite invincible abhorrence of infidelity, in the minds of all, who have the slightest remaining regard for the character of Christ and his apostles. It is their wisdom to conceal the deformity and monstrosity of their unbelief; but such concealment is not on that account, the less discreditable to themselves and to the cause which they advocate. It is proper therefore, that all men should know and feel, that there is no alternative, between allowing Christianity to be true, and proclaiming its first preachers, the most unprincipled and malignant villains, that ever existed. Let infidelity boldly avow the impossibility of any other conclusion. Let every Christian, and especially every wavering Christian, fully understand the price at which he renounces

his faith. It has been his glory and delight to honour Christ as his most blessed Saviour. Infidelity compels him to call him Anathema! He has esteemed the characters of the apostles most holy; he cannot be an infidel, without admitting them to have been the most pitifully silly, and atrociously wicked wretches, recorded in history. Again we repeat it, that one or other of these opinions must be the true one. No medium *can* be otherwise than false.

Having then decided the promulgators of Christianity, to have been the most foolish and the worst of men, it is natural to inquire how far the doctrine they preached, and the lives they led, accord with the decision. Of their doctrine, it is not needful to say more, in this place, than that it is the purest in morals, the most benevolent in design, and the most perfect in unity, that the world ever saw; that it has exalted men and nations, from the foulest sensuality, to the highest character of virtue; that it has diffused happiness wherever it has prevailed, and finally, that to those who have cordially received it, it has communicated a glorious hope of an immortality of perfect honour and felicity.

Such was the doctrine propagated by the vilest of men, at the most amazing sacrifices and hazards! And what were their lives? They were the most inconsistently pure that can be imagined. These men not only made every sacrifice of the good things of this life, but they

gave up all their prejudices, both personal and national; they corrected their constitutional and habitual failings; they resigned their wills and affections, to the extraordinary enterprize in which they were engaged; they denied themselves of every indulgence; they censured the slightest laxity in their followers; they jealously guarded them against the shadow of evil; they affected the most tender sympathy with them in their distresses; they fully shared their persecutions; and were equally their leaders, in the time of the fiercest attacks of their enemies, and in moments of comparative peace and prosperity. They yielded up all right to the personal attachment of their people, except on the ground of having brought them under the influence of Christianity. In short, they walked before the eyes of men, the living examples of the truths they taught.

Nor was their conduct less remote from what is enthusiastic, than from what is vicious. They made no effort at display, either in virtue or endurance. They shunned danger, as carefully as if they had feared it, and sought to retain their liberties and lives, at every sacrifice not inconsistent with the enterprize to which they had bound themselves. They availed themselves of every civil right which appeared to promise any, even temporary, relief from suffering and oppression; and when they were ill-treated in one place, they sought security by flying to another. In all these respects, they appear to have felt and

acted as other men, and to have possessed as little desire of infamy and pain, and as strong a love of ease and life. Yet when at last retreat was cut off, and escape was no longer possible, there was no yielding to the pressure of calamity on the one hand, nor any thing of saucy bravado on the other. They died with the coolest and most unperturbed heroism, employing their last breath in calling upon God for the pardon of those, whose hands were red with their blood.

All this the infidel must and does acknowledge. He must and tacitly does confess, that they were men of the most undaunted wickedness, who lived and died in the practice of the most exalted virtue ;—that they sacrificed every good for no conceivable advantage ;—that they rendered themselves and all around them wretched for the promulgation of a lie ;—that they loved vice for its own sake, and under the influence of that love, practised themselves, and inculcated on others, an irreproachable moral purity, and that the foundation and source of all their excellence was a scheme of flagrant villany. It is difficult to say, whether they approached nearest our ideas of the benignity and holiness of God, or the malice and depravity of the devil. They were men whose lives had no motive, no meaning, no object. They can be measured by no known rule, nor understood by any known principles. They were in short, perfect self-contradictions—contra-

dictions to all reason, and to human nature itself, in every form which it has yet assumed, or of which we can ever conceive it capable.

To illustrate yet more fully the argument of this chapter, let us suppose one of the apostles thus haranguing the rest, after the death of Christ:—

“No truth can be so deeply impressed on our minds, as that our master continues under the dominion of death; and we all know that truth stands so ready at the door of the lips, that the greatest liar among us has hitherto uttered a thousand truths for one falsehood. But henceforth, on this most interesting subject, we must never let a single truth escape us, either in our most unguarded moments, or when put to the torture; for all will be lost, if one person in whom we may place confidence, should reveal to our enemies what should be known to ourselves alone.

“Others have been wonderfully supported under violent and tedious sufferings, by the internal persuasion that they suffered for the truth, but as we are called upon to give new proofs of courage, by suffering for what we know to be an impious falsehood, every reflection which tended to support them will torment us, and tempt us in the most forcible manner, to betray our cause. All our

designs will prove abortive, if we suffer the fear of God to get possession of our minds. Assertions of falsehood will no doubt cost us something in the beginning, but we must endeavour to make ourselves as easy as we can, by imprinting strongly on our minds, how glorious and disinterested it will be, to suffer without hope either from God or man, and even with the certainty of being punished both by God and man, not only in this life, but eternally in the next, if there be another. All the men and women of our company, must be capable of braving Omnipotence, and of deriving new vigour and resolution from the prospect of uninterrupted misery.

“Our rulers, and indeed our countrymen in general, expect that the Messiah shall be a great and invincible hero. As such, they say, he is foretold by the prophets; but the person we mean to impose upon them as the Messiah, expressly disclaimed all worldly greatness, and made the sufferings of himself and his followers, one test of the truth of his pretensions to the character which he assumed. Some of the most subtle among us, therefore, must carefully examine the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, and wrest all the prophecies of the true Messiah in favour of him whom we know to be an impostor. The enterprize, as it is directly opposed, not only by truth, but also by all the prejudices and hopes of the nation, is indeed bold, but what is the whole design but the excess of boldness?

“We have hitherto believed that the religion of our forefathers is true, and was given by God to Moses. It is certainly the most ancient, the most authorized, and the purest religion in the world, and the only one founded on divine revelation, or that boasts of such a foundation. But if we are to preach to the whole world that our master, whom we know to be an impostor, is the true and only Messiah, and if we are to apply to him prophecies which have another object, we must necessarily despise this most ancient religion, which our fathers and we have hitherto deemed divine and incontrovertible.

“We have but the interval between the present moment and the feast of Pentecost, in which to prepare the order of false apparitions, and fix it in the memories of our numerous coadjutors, both male and female; to study in the scriptures all that relates to the Messiah; to form the plan and adjust the parts of a new religion; to efface in our minds all traces of the ancient one, and to fortify ourselves against our prejudices, our fears, and our worldly interests; for we must get quit of all these, since we are going most generously to renounce all the good of this life, and all the hopes of the next.

“I am sure that with our Galilean pronunciation, and with the goodly appearance we shall make in our fisherman's garments, we shall persuade a multitude of people. Nay, so confident am I of our success, that I include in my design,

not only Judea, but all the nations of the earth. Nor shall I be discouraged by the diversity of religions, manners, and tongues which prevail in the world; be affrighted by the hostile power of all mankind, or have my zeal in the least abated for him who has deceived us, by the improbability of being able to make the Gentiles, who know nothing of the scriptures of the Messiah, adore as the Son of God, the man whom the Jews have crucified as an impostor.

“In the mean time, it will be proper to accustom ourselves to the most inhuman spectacles, in order to arrive by degrees at such a hardness of heart, as nothing can be supposed to move. We shall see multitudes of people seduced by our discourses, proscribed, banished, thrown into dark prisons, torn in pieces by agonies of torture, condemned to wild beasts, to the fire, and to the most shameful and insupportable punishments, for preaching with us the resurrection of Jesus. Now as we are by nature inclined to compassion, we might be tempted to relieve them from such exquisite misery, since we could effectually do it by a single word, but this word, which would discover the whole mystery, must never slip from our mouths. We must place our joy in their wretchedness, and we must not be afraid to honour them, and cause them to be honoured, as illustrious witnesses of the truth, though we know them to be only martyrs to our hypocrisy, &c.”¹

¹ Edinburgh Encyclopædia.

Again ; let us imagine an infidel seriously to set himself to describe the character of one of the apostles ; say, for example, that of Paul. Were he candid and consistent, we might expect from him, a sketch something like the following :—

The apostle Paul was born in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia. His father and mother were both Hebrews ; and the former was of that severe sect called Pharisees or separatists, to which the subject of this sketch united himself in his youth. Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, and was circumcised according to the exact letter of the law of Moses. He was exemplary for his strict virtue from an early age. His education was perfectly Jewish. While yet young, he was sent from the place of his nativity to Jerusalem, and became the pupil of Gamaliel, at that time a celebrated doctor of Hebrew and rabbinical literature and divinity, an eminent pharisee, and a member of the Jewish senate of seventy. Under such tuition, as might have been expected, he imbibed the religious prejudices of his countrymen to an extraordinary degree. His mind, naturally powerful and ardent, soon attained a proficiency beyond that of his contemporaries ; and it is probable that he looked forward to the highest distinctions, which laymen might attain among the Jews.

When the resurrection of Christ was first preached at Jerusalem, Saul, (as he was then called,) in common with the most eminent of his countrymen, instantly perceived it to be an abom-

inable imposture, and with a virtuous indignation which well comported with his previous character, exerted himself vigorously for its extirpation. At the execution of Stephen, the first of the absurd and wicked wretches, who were put to death for preaching the fables of Christianity, Saul, though he left his actual punishment to other hands, stood by with religious satisfaction, and took care of the upper garments of those who were occupied about it. He afterwards received, from the chief priests of the Jews, a sort of general commission against the professors of Christianity, and well did he employ it. Many persons of both sexes, he apprehended and shut up in prison: many he compelled to renounce Jesus with execrations; and others by his zeal and activity, were driven to seek safety in foreign lands. Whenever the question was agitated as to the punishment of a refractory Christian, Saul voted for the severest measures, and several were executed mainly through his instrumentality. No one could have been a more zealous agent of the designs of the Jewish council, and he was probably as much caressed by them, as he was detested by the Christians. Nothing too, could have been more satisfactory to his virtuously disposed mind, than the effort to destroy such execrable miscreants as the original promulgators of the falsehoods of the New Testament.

To the Christians, of course, it was of great importance to rid themselves of so vigilant a

champion against their crimes. It is a matter of surprise that he was not assassinated. His escape could not have been from any want of disposition or courage on the part of his enemies, since their conduct proves them to have been the most intrepid and unflinching villains, of whom we have any record in history. From some cause, however, which must now remain unexplained, they did not resort to this method of removing an opponent whom they so much dreaded.

It seems at last to have been resolved by them, to attempt by fair means to win him over to their own party. Some of them, no doubt, would object to make the full confession of their imposture, to one who might naturally be expected to take advantage of their misplaced confidence, and to publish their acknowledged wickedness to the rulers and the world. They would argue;—he has every thing he can desire; learning, reputation, distinction, friends, and the personal satisfaction of conscious virtue; and what can we offer to induce him to league himself with us? We are poor, illiterate, persecuted, and daily exposed to death,—wicked, infamous, courting sorrow in this world, and perdition in the next. The reply may be easily imagined;—if we can love vice, pain, and dishonour, for their own sakes; if it delights us to make ourselves miserable, and all mankind besides; if we esteem it glorious to be exposed to all manner of evil here, and to God's just judgment hereafter, why may

not he feel the same? If we have overcome our Jewish prejudices, there is no reason why he should not do so likewise; and besides, to get rid of so severe a persecutor, and secure an auxiliary so zealous, so respectable, and so perfectly acquainted with the Jewish scriptures and theology, —is worth some little hazard.

These and similar arguments, it would appear, prevailed; the attempt was made; and to the honour of the sagacity of its projectors, it succeeded beyond their most sanguine hope. It does not seem that they had the slightest difficulty in the negociation. Saul immediately, and without any intelligible motive, forgot the honour of his Roman citizenship, and submitted to profess himself the disciple of an impostor, who had died the death of a Roman slave. Spite of his apparent attachment to the Jewish religion, he without hesitation united himself to a conspiracy for its overthrow. Forgetful of all sorts of obligations and pledges to the Jewish rulers, he committed himself to the enterprize against which he and they had waged the most resolute war. In a moment, he laid aside the ties, the prejudices, and the habits of years; sacrificed what he believed to be the truth; abandoned all consistency; trampled on his well earned reputation; forsook all hopes of distinction; renounced the superiority of learning, and pledged all his energies to an undertaking, the foundation of which was the most wicked imposture, and the design,

to spread falsehood and misery throughout the world;—an undertaking which inevitably brought on its advocates remorse of conscience, the abhorrence of all virtuous men, the severest inflictions of secular power, poverty, torture, death, with the vengeance of God, in this and a future world.

Saul having in private joined the confederacy of Christians, they immediately proceeded to make arrangements for his public avowal of Christianity in such a way, as would produce the greatest eclat. It seems to have been agreed that he should apply for letters from the chief priests to Damascus, authorizing him to apprehend the Christians there, and that while he was engaged in executing this commission, he should pretend to be converted and called to the apostleship of Christianity, by some miraculous means. It appears also to have been arranged, that as his attachment to the Jewish religion was so well known, he should go immediately to preach among the Gentiles, both because association with them would the sooner destroy his former manners, and also because his casting so great a slight on the maxims of the Jews, would prove how much he was in earnest in his new profession, and would render the breach irreparable between him and his former associates.

Having therefore obtained the necessary credentials, Saul set out for Damascus accompanied by several others, who were by the Jewish rulers

appointed to assist him. When they had arrived near the end of their journey, about the middle of the day, an incident occurred, which afforded him a favourable opportunity of putting his scheme in execution. A violent thunder storm came on, and one very vivid flash of lightning struck down himself and his companions. While prostrate on the earth, he affected to receive a miraculous call from Jesus himself to the profession and apostleship of Christianity. He contrived also to persuade those who were with him, that they heard a continued noise resembling a powerful human voice, although not any articulate sound.

When he rose from the ground, he pretended to have been blinded by the miraculous light which had shone round them, and was conducted by his companions into the city of Damascus. Here he put on the appearance of great consternation for several days, and refused to take any food. At length, he was visited by a Christian of the name of Ananias, a person esteemed reputable by the Jews, who of course had been made a party to the fraud. He professed to have seen a vision, in which he was directed to go to Saul, and put his hands on his eyes, that he might again receive his sight, and be thus confirmed in his attachment to Christianity. Saul, on his part, affected to have had a visionary representation of this very person, and of what he afterwards really did. The ceremony was then performed: it was

reported that something like scales fell from the eyes of the new apostle, and that he immediately saw perfectly.

Saul, without delay, began to preach Jesus, and overwhelmed the Jews at Damascus, by the speciousness of his arguments, and by his effrontery in proclaiming them. The plunge was now fully made: the man of irreproachable virtue had, without any inducement, publicly and entirely given up his energies to the dominion of vice. The judge had voluntarily descended from his tribunal, to mix himself with the criminals, and the persecutor had freely, and with the full apprehension of the results,—chosen the lot of the persecuted;—a spectacle of outrageous and unaccountable infamy, such as never before shocked the moral sense of mankind. The indignation of the Jews at this treachery, may be imagined, and they determined not to allow the renegade from their venerable religion to escape with his life. The gates of the city were guarded day and night for his apprehension, but he was let down from the wall by night in a basket. He immediately went on a mission into Arabia, and after some time, ventured back to Damascus.

Christianity never had a more active, zealous, intrepid, and plausible advocate than the apostle Paul. Never was there one, who contributed so fully to digest it into a system, and to render all its parts harmonious. Never was there one, who so powerfully urged its arguments, enforced

its morality, or expounded its sanctions; and never was there one, whose life more fully corresponded with what he taught. Several of his letters are extant, and they abound in passages of clear, conclusive reasoning, severely virtuous reproof, pathetic expostulation, eloquent morality, and touching, though unostentatious allusion to his own sufferings and disinterestedness. No mind or character could be more remote from what is in ordinary estimation, sordid or mercenary. He must be allowed to have been at least *one* of the most independent, lofty minded, and gratuitous villains ever heard of.

He preached Christianity with great success, in the principal cities of the Roman empire; such as Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Athens, Phillipi, and Rome itself; and he was as remarkable for his sufferings, as for his labours. His own account of them might awaken something of sympathy, were it not for our horror at his wickedness, and our sense of the justice of his punishments.—“Even unto this present hour,” he says, speaking of himself and his associates, “we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.” Speaking of himself alone, he says; “Of the Jews

five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft."

During the time of his second imprisonment at Rome, it is said that he succeeded in imposing on the credulity of one of the emperor's mistresses, and inducing her to degrade herself to the profession of Christianity; by which of course, she renounced the high station to which she had been elevated by the favour of her imperial lover. Nero indignant at being interrupted in his pleasures, did that to which a bare sense of justice could not before induce him,—he ordered Paul to be beheaded.

Could we for one moment suppose that this apostle was himself imposed upon, our indignation would justly be exchanged for the deepest compassion: but his whole life affords too convincing proof of contrivance and intentional deceit. His perfect acquaintance with the Jewish scriptures,—his intimate knowledge of the proceedings of the council at Jerusalem, and his own subsequent boast of miraculous powers and works, with the

statements of his friends and associates to the same effect, are a series of evidences of his fraudulent purposes, which it is impossible to evade.

Or even had the facts been otherwise, where, among the first promulgators of Christianity, do we discover a mind equal to impose upon such an one as Paul? They were men without cultivation, and by no means distinguished by any thing like the vigor of intellect or clearness of apprehension which marks *his* sermons and letters. Peter, the foremost among them, was an ardent, simple, impetuous character, and as utterly unfitted by nature, as he was unqualified by education, for involving a logical and cultivated mind in the meshes of subtle and sophisticated theory. Let any one read his writings and contrast them with those of the subject of this sketch, and it will be obvious, that if either had imposed upon the other, Peter and not Paul would have been the dupe. Hence we find that the latter, upon his assuming the profession of Christianity, stood immediately at the head of his associates, and not one of them is ever brought into contrast with him, without the most convincing proof of his extraordinary superiority. It follows therefore that he could not have been deceived as to the real character of Christianity.

Every imposture is wickedness; every religious imposture, an insult to God. Christianity, during the first ages of its existence, had the aggravation

of producing the keenest anguish, the most painful privations, and the most extensive peril and wretchedness, wherever it prevailed. Mohammedanism, no doubt, was productive of misery also, but Mohammedanism only injured its enemies. Christianity brought the heaviest calamities on its friends. Mohammedanism drew its sword only against those whom it cursed; Christianity blessed and destroyed. Men were safe while they remained at a distance from it, but its embrace was fatal. Mohammedanism had its motives; Christianity had none. The one allowed its proselytes the indulgence of sensuality and violence; the other strictly forbade both. Mohammedanism was shaped to sanction the licentiousness of its prophet; Christianity compelled its professors to the most rigid self-renunciation. The one was a stirring religion, and therefore fitted for ambitious men; the other was a religion of endurance, patience, and submission. The falsehood of Mohammedanism was concealed in the breast of its founder; the falsehood of Christianity was known to hundreds and thousands of its votaries. Christianity therefore, from its want of motive, its miserable results on its best friends, its gratuitous cruelty, and its essential depraving power, may justly be deemed the most atrocious outrage against God and man, and the most comprehensive scheme of villainy ever conceived. Its first preachers must all have understood it to be so,

and their wickedness is therefore beyond parallel.

But there are several considerations which go to place Paul even above the range of the criminality of his associates, and prove him,

“The first of men, in sovereign *infamy*.”

For as on the one hand, his superior intelligence precluded the possibility of the slightest delusion, so on the other, did it enable him to trace, more fully than the other apostles, the certain results of Christianity. The mischief which it would cause in the world to innumerable masses of men, and all the calamities which would every where follow its footsteps,—must have been vividly impressed on his mind. He had habitually contemplated it in its darkest colours, he had made himself master of the strongest arguments against it in their most cogent form, and his mind had expatiated on the extreme wickedness of its advocates and promoters, for several years; while they of course, had only allowed themselves to dwell on the least shocking features of the enterprise, and in some few instances perhaps, had almost persuaded themselves that there was something in it resembling virtue. But Paul joined the confederacy with the most comprehensive conviction of its enormity, and with his mind fully awake to the dishonour which it did to God, and the frightful evil which in this and a future world, it brought upon men.

In favour of the other apostles too, it is to be remarked, that they, in the first place, were

themselves deceived. There can be no question, but what they for some time supposed Jesus to have been what he professed. It was not till three days after his death, and when all hope of his resurrection had passed away, that they became deceivers. They had then committed themselves to Christianity, and they were probably ashamed to draw back. But this was not the case with Paul. From the beginning he had discerned the falsehood of Christianity, and had treated it accordingly. Had he possessed any sort of shame, it would have operated in precisely the opposite way, to that of his associates. He was pledged to the enemies of Christianity, and had committed himself to them as fully and as publicly as possible. By them he was caressed and honoured; he was admitted to the intimacy and favour of the most exalted characters of the Jewish nation; while, under colour of remaining their friend and partizan, he joined himself to the men, whom of all others they most abhorred. It is sufficiently plain, that he must have been secretly united to the Christians, long before his open avowal of their faith. He must have taken some considerable time and given diligent study, to have made himself master of the subject of which he was afterwards so successful, consistent, and even eloquent a writer and preacher. No one, who does not believe the history of his conversion as related in the New Testament, can suppose that he left Jerusalem a perfect Jew, full of

prejudice and rage, and in less than a week, sprang up in Damascus, a perfectly instructed Christian and a preacher of the Gentiles. This we can readily admit, would have been a miracle indeed. His defection from his Jewish friends and patrons therefore, proved him to have been utterly destitute of shame, and capable of the most abominable treachery and ingratitude, while his attaching himself to Christianity, illustrates the finished and unnatural character of his depravity.

The Jewish religion he believed to be true: Christianity he must have known, to be false. Nothing could have more dishonoured the truth, in the eyes of men generally; nothing cast a greater slight on the venerable institutions of Moses; nothing more materially tended to weaken the courage of their friends and guardians, than the apostasy of so active, zealous, and apparently virtuous an agent: while on the other hand, nothing could have more powerfully recommended falsehood, hypocrisy, and imposture. All this he must have fully understood. His perfect acquaintance with all the facts and arguments of Christianity, prove his choice of it to have been the result of long and studious deliberation. Nothing therefore could have been more marked than his contempt for what he believed the truth of God, except indeed it were his love for falsehood, as the activity of the first period of his life against Christianity, was not to be compared to his subsequent labours in its favour.

The monstrous and unnatural malignancy of his heart cannot be estimated, except by a comparison of his condition as a Jew, with the circumstances in which he was subsequently placed. While an agent of the sanhedrim, his employment was in itself exactly suited to a zealot. It was actively to search out, to apprehend, and punish individuals, against whom he was himself violently incensed. He was applauded on all hands for his exertion, and had every facility afforded him, which could be commanded by the patronage and assistance of all the authorities, both secular and religious. His own notions of religion too, would supply him with mighty stimulus from within: and he had on the whole, every conceivable inducement to continue this course of conduct.

His condition was widely different when he had no outward encouragement, nor in fact any inward excitement either, except a disinterested attachment to fraud. In the second period of his life, though he still had much to do, he had yet more to endure; and to such an ardent temper as that of Paul, labour, however severe, is light compared to endurance. He had to bear all the reproaches of his former associates for treachery, apostasy, and ingratitude,—charges which his own heart told him were justly merited: he had to labour under the distinct consciousness that he was the object of their bitterest scorn, and most righteous hatred, and that he was

constantly exposed to their attempts against his life. He had to suffer the sneers of the Gentiles, to whom he preached salvation through a Galilean malefactor, who died the death of a slave at Jerusalem, while every circumstance of his education and previous habits, tended to augment the contumely to which he was exposed, and to increase the hopelessness of his strange and iniquitous enterprise. What could the highest Jewish scholar,—with his barbarous Greek, abounding in Hebraisms,—hope from the rhetoricians and philosophers of Athens, but the most perfect contempt? He had often to endure the divisions, the heart-burnings, and even the ungrateful reproaches of his own converts. He had little assistance from other Christian preachers, as for the most part, he laboured in regions which they had never visited; nor had he opportunities of intercourse with the apostles generally, for many years after he became a preacher of Christianity. He had not only to subdue his pride and prejudice, but to keep his excitable spirit in a state of the utmost apparent equanimity, under continual provocation. And no man ever succeeded in preserving more fully the appearance of patience, even towards his most determined enemies. With how great semblance of deep compassion, does he breathe forth his wishes for the welfare of the Jews! In how striking a manner, does he chide and renounce every thing like partizanship in his favour, among the

churches which he had planted; and in short, with what distinguished calmness does he pass through all the irritating incidents, to which he was constantly exposed!

Meanwhile, for all his labour and suffering, he had no motive but his disinterested delight in wickedness and mischief, unless he could find motive in the remorse of a guilty conscience, and the apprehensions of vengeance from a justly incensed God. He was willing himself to be wretched, both in this and a future world, so long as he could have the fiendish delight of rendering others so. Beyond this, he had nothing to sustain his spirit in solitary labours, in painful journeys, in popular tumults, at Gentile tribunals, and in the other perils and sorrows by which he was constantly surrounded. But upheld by a consciousness of the most flagrant guilt, and triumphing in the miseries of his fellow men, he never faltered, nor hesitated, till his course of mysterious iniquity was terminated by the sword of justice. In the proportion in which his intelligence, education and rank exceeded that of the other apostles, so did his atrocity; and it should be distinguished as one of the few praise-worthy acts in the life of Nero, that he condignly punished the apostle Paul,—a man in the comparison with whose wickedness, his own life seems almost virtue.

But of this enough: these opinions are so unnatural and revolting, that there never has been found an infidel with sufficient hardihood to avow them. Yet they are the inevitable results of the rejection of the New Testament. What then shall we say of a system, the ultimate consequences of which its boldest advocates feel themselves compelled studiously to conceal? What shall we think of the discretion of that man who has allied himself to such a system without inquiring into the conclusions to which it unavoidably leads? or if he has ascertained such conclusions, what must be our opinion of his ingenuousness? Before however we dismiss the entire subject, it may be proper to add a few considerations, which may serve to render it still more manifest, that the unbeliever is responsible for these and all other absurdities involved in the rejection of Christianity. This will be attempted in the following and concluding chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

RESPONSIBILITY OF INFIDELS FOR ALL THE ABSURDITIES INVOLVED IN THE REJECTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

Christianity accused of bigotry.—Infidelity really intolerant.—Man's non-accountability, a last resort of scepticism.—Men are universally allowed to be accountable for their belief on mathematical and historical subjects,—and on questions of conventional morality.—If they are not responsible for their belief, neither are they for their conduct.—A divine revelation probable.—If God gave a revelation, man would be accountable for his reception of it.—Its doctrines, according to the Infidel, must be more honourable to God, and its morals more pure than those of the Bible.—It must be free from all mystery, or unphilosophical phraseology,—evidenced by something more convincing than miracles—or prophecy—or remarkable preservation for many ages—or the most splendid moral revolutions.—Every professor of its faith must understand it in precisely the same way—and must at once be morally perfect.—God could not compel our faith without dishonour to his own government,—nor increase the evidences of the divinity of Christianity, so as to overcome the unbelief of the heart.—Corollaries.—The risk of Infidelity.—CONCLUSION.

ONE of the common boasts of infidelity, is its readiness to tolerate varieties of opinion, on questions of theology and morals. It is supposed by

some, that a disregard to all religion, is invariably connected with great liberality, and that a reverence for Christianity, necessarily produces bigotry and intolerance. It is true, that the man who cordially receives the doctrines of the New Testament, must believe those who reject them, to be under the disapprobation of God. The higher our notions are of the excellence of Christianity, the more certainly must we feel that unbelief is a damning sin; since it is nothing less in our estimation, than giving God the lie, and casting the most signal dishonour on the union and perfection of all his attributes. The science of salvation is as unvarying in its requirements, as any other science; and the geometrician may as rationally be called a bigot, because he rigidly refuses to allow any way to the attainment of geometry, except through its elementary truths, as the Christian can be deemed intolerant, because he disallows every method of salvation, except through Christ.

We readily admit that infidels are sufficiently tolerant of unbelief in all its shapes, and with all its vices; and that men, who have themselves no regard for religion, are not often severe in scrutinizing the *opinions* of those who shew no disposition to be *practical* Christians: but nothing can be more erroneous than the notion, that they peculiarly reverence the rights of conscience, or that their indifference extends itself to the sober and consistent professors of Christianity. On the

contrary, some of the fiercest persecutors of pagan and papal Rome, have been persons of this class; and Voltaire in one of his letters, regrets that the philosophers were not sufficiently numerous, zealous, and powerful to root out Christianity by fire and sword.¹ He who loads the believers in the New Testament with bitter and malignant scorn, and shows his hatred of them by indecent and brutal abuse, only abstains from a more severe and palpable expression of his abhorrence, because the secular arm happens to be extended for their protection, and not for their extermination. While therefore, we are thankful to God, that there is at present, no opportunity of putting to the test, the popular maxims of infidel liberality, we cannot but esteem them left-handed professions, the benefit of which is intended for their authors, and not for us.

One of the opinions of this kind, most popular in the present day, is, that man is not accountable for his belief. For his practice, it is allowed on all hands, that man is accountable, and that he is justly esteemed infamous or reputable accordingly: but it is strenuously contended, that the application of this principle, does not, and cannot be made to extend to his opinions on religious subjects. His character as a being possessed of common sense and reason, we are told, does not

1. Quarterly Review, Vol. xxviii. p. 496. Yet this is the person whose "CHRISTIAN CHARITY" is so highly eulogized by Lady Morgan in her "France."

depend on what he believes or disbelieves, and one man who admits, and another who disallows one and the same system of doctrine, however fully authenticated, is equally rational and equally reputable. This dogma has been pronounced by high authorities, and echoed by all the infidel coteries throughout the land. The principle on which it is founded, of course is, that belief is something over which men have no control; and from the same principle it follows, not only that man is not accountable for his sentiments on religious subjects, but that he is equally irresponsible on all others, be they historical, scientific, or philosophical. It also follows, not only that a man is not accountable to his fellow for his belief, but that neither is he accountable to God. For if he is accountable to God, it must be admitted that he has some control over that belief for which he is accountable; and if he possesses any such control, he is amenable for his opinions at the bar of reason and common sense.

It is important that we notice this opinion a little more at large, as it is a last resort of infidelity. For when we have succeeded in proving, that scripture morality is worthy of God,—that scripture miracles are really divine,—that scripture prophecy is truly what it professes to be, and that scripture characters are unintelligible and unnatural, except by the admission of the inspiration of the Bible,—it is easy for our antagonist to say;—"After all, I cannot believe the truth of

Christianity; and you know I am not accountable for my belief." If this plea then be correct, we must here abandon the question altogether; and neither God nor man can condemn the person who resorts to it. Infidelity, in this case, is no fault. Atheism itself is not the monstrous thing, which our less sagacious or more scrupulous ancestors deemed it, but merely a sort of amiable indiscretion. Nay, a profound critic, in the *Westminster Review*,¹ determined to try how much the principle is able to bear, without breaking its back, showed some time since, that Atheism may prove only another and peculiarly excellent species of saving faith!

There are certain propositions admitted by all who understand them, because they are capable of demonstration. He who, by a regular train of mathematical deduction, arrives at any particular conclusion, would be deemed a fool or something worse, if he questioned, either really or affectedly, the correctness of the conclusion. Next to those things which we perceive intuitively, such as our own existence, and the axioms of geometry, a process of reasoning of this kind, admits of the least possibility of error; in fact, nothing but universal scepticism can reject it. Now if a man's happiness in this life, and in a future state, were in some way made to depend upon the admission of a proposition, the truth of which was thus demonstrated, who is there that would for a moment

1. No. xi. Art. i. pp. 20, 21.

question the obligation in such a case? Would it avail the unbeliever here to say, that he had no control over his faith, and would not all men allow, that unless he were really of incapable mind, his misery in this world and hereafter, was unimpeachably just?

But we do not expect mathematical demonstration in matters of fact, or history, nor on questions of morals, although our belief in reference to them, is not on that account, the less assured and rational. In courts of judicature for instance, it is sufficient for a credible person to affirm that he witnessed the fact to be substantiated, and often much less than this is admitted. But there are many reasons with which we are not at all acquainted, which may induce a witness to conceal the truth, or to offer false testimony; and yet, if there be no obvious reason to suspect his statements, they are unhesitatingly received, and the property, liberties, and lives of men are disposed of accordingly. Judicial testimony therefore, only amounts to probability; but it is in very many instances, so completely satisfactory, that he would be an irrational and perjured man, who did not act upon it, as fully, as if it had been matter of mathematical demonstration.

Again; we believe that there lived some two thousand years ago, a person named Julius Cæsar, and that a certain volume of commentaries in the Latin tongue, is really his work. The assurance of these two facts is not any thing resembling

demonstration ; but results from the evidence of contemporary historians, the existence of coins bearing his effigies and name, and the tradition, through all intervening ages, that he was what previous historians represent him, and among other particulars, that he was the author of the commentaries attributed to him. And yet, notwithstanding this universal belief, it is possible that the tradition respecting the achievements and character of Cæsar, may be fabulous ; his coins may have been forged, and his commentaries written long since the period to which they are ascribed ; but who on the ground of the possibility, ever ventured to question either his existence, or the historical facts of his life ? who in fact could question them, without being driven with scorn from the society of all rational men ?

As to questions of morals, the nature of satisfactory testimony is yet of another kind. If all nations agree in condemning and punishing certain actions, as prejudicial to individuals and society, there can be no doubt, that as far at least as conventional morality is concerned, such actions are really crimes. The law of no nation ever made provision for any dissentient from this opinion ; and common sense teaches, that no such provision could possibly be made. If for example, a man is detected in an act of theft, it is not, and ought not to be admitted as the slightest apology for him to say, that he cannot allow the distinctions of property to be either reasonable or

obligatory ; or to affirm, that no one can prove any abstract fitness, in his neighbour's possessing this or the other article, any more than himself.

Mathematical and scientific truth we admit to be capable of a more convincing description of evidence than historical or moral truth ; and yet it is sufficiently obvious, that the rejection of certain opinions of the two last named classes, is as ridiculous as the disbelief of propositions capable of mathematical demonstration. It is as absurd for example, to deny that there was such a city as Babylon, and that there were such persons as Cyrus and Themistocles, or that murder and theft are crimes, as that two right angles are equal to a triangle. He who questioned such historical or moral truths, would be esteemed by all as an irrational person, and one not to be argued with.

Besides, it is not at all difficult to prove, that he who is not responsible for his opinions, is not responsible for his conduct ; and then the maxim in question throws down all the barriers which law and right reason have reared against vice. As no opinion is too monstrous not to find some advocates, so no licentiousness would be too brutal not to have some patrons. Nor is this a merely hypothetical view of the case. Infidelity has already furnished its advocates for covetousness, rapacity, falsehood, suicide, adultery, and vices too foul to be named ; and there is no other crime, which might not quite as readily be justified, by the aid of so con-

venient a principle as man's non-accountability for his belief. If Mr. Hume were not accountable to God and man for believing in the propriety of adultery, why should he be accountable for practising it, or why any other man for believing in the propriety of theft, or for practising it? To say that theft is too obviously an evil, to permit any one sincerely to question it, is to make yourself a judge for another, and of consequence to make him accountable to you. He alone must be the judge for himself, whether he can or cannot believe theft to be an evil; and certainly in the published ethics of some infidel philosophers, there are some arguments which go very strongly to justify the practice. How frightful a state of society would result from allowing every one thus to shape his own opinion and conduct, without being accountable to either God or man, it needs no great sagacity to conjecture.

From the whole therefore, we conclude that man *is* accountable for his belief. The contrary opinion is unphilosophical in itself; it is contradicted by every man's common sense, and by all the principles of justice and law. If allowed its practical operation, it would destroy all the bonds of society, and all sense of the government of God and religion; it would confound truth with falsehood, and vice with virtue; it would make every man an enemy to his fellow, and introduce crimes and calamities, without number, and beyond calculation. And if man is accountable

for his belief generally, he is equally so for his belief on the subject of Christianity. The infidel is responsible as a rational being, for all the absurdities resulting from his rejection of the New Testament; he is responsible to God for all the dishonour which his unbelief does to Christ, for all the evils which it produces on society, and for the hinderance of that moral good, which might take place in his own character, and through him be conveyed to others. He stands convicted at the bar of right reason, for rebellion against her authority; let him show cause why judgment should not be pronounced upon him. Another indictment, before a more august tribunal, awaits him; let him prepare his defence, and nerve his heart to meet it. Or rather, let him, before that court of irrevocable and eternal decree is set, turn in penitence to Him who will then be his Judge, but who is now waiting to be his Saviour, and who, to encourage a present application to his clemency,—proclaims, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.”

The only defence which I can anticipate from the unbeliever against the sentence of common sense, is, either that it is irrational to expect God to reveal himself to man, or that there is no sufficient evidence that the Bible is a divine revelation. But if it can be proved, that God might be reasonably expected to make known to man, his nature and his will; and that the Bible

is accompanied with as perfect evidence as the circumstances of the case will admit, it will follow, that every man who rejects it, dishonours himself as a rational creature, and that he is already condemned, and will finally, unless he repent, be punished by his Creator.

Is there then any impossibility in a revelation of the will of God? The reply is obvious: that only is impossible to God which involves a contradiction, or which is morally opposed to the divine nature. There is therefore, in the nature of things, no reason why such a communication might not be made. On the contrary, it is highly consonant with our notions of the character of God, that he should thus instruct his intelligent creatures; that he should assure us of his existence, instruct us in his character, direct us to our duty, encourage us to goodness by the promises of happiness, and seek to deter us from evil by the apprehension of punishment. If God is good, and this is on all hands allowed, and if we are ignorant, and this is equally obvious, does it not appear quite in character with the divine benevolence, to furnish us with instruction on the most important of all subjects? If God is merciful, and we guilty, is it unreasonable to expect that he will point out to us, the way in which his favour may be obtained? If He is pure, and we sinful, it cannot be inconsistent for him to teach us how we may resemble him. If He is almighty, and we exposed to a variety of accidents and

natural ills, is it irrational to suppose, that he would offer us the consolation to be derived from the doctrine of a universal and benignant providence? Whatever we gather respecting the character of God, and whatever we know of ourselves, holds out to us reason to believe, that He might thus communicate with his creatures, not only without sullyng his own glory, but in the most perfect operation of his attributes, to the highest honour of his moral government, and the incalculable advantage of the human family.

Indeed, I cannot understand how such instruction can be withheld, without dishonour to God and injustice to man. It is not the least of the absurdities of infidelity, in my judgment, to assert that a Being, whom we all allow to be benevolent, keeps his creatures in ignorance, on the subjects which of all others they are most interested to understand; that a holy Being affords them no facilities for escaping from moral defilement, and tolerates the existence of sin in his government, which it is in his power to remove; that a just Being evinces no sort of care for the justification and righteousness of those whom He has made; and that we are left to doubt, and sorrow; crime, care, and misery, when it would be easy in God to give us every assurance we could desire, to open to us unfailing sources of purity and happiness, and to dispel the darkness in which we are now enveloped, by the light of hope, and peace, and joy. There is something so distressing

in the idea that our Creator is thus utterly regardless of our welfare, that atheism itself would to my mind, be preferable; and could I believe, with the deist, that no moral provision had been made for man, beyond the bewildering and contradictory guesses of what is called natural religion, I would shut my senses and my spirit against the beauty and action of this visible universe, strive to persuade myself that there was no God, and seek refuge in the dulness and apathy of the doctrines of chance or necessity.

But were God to make a revelation of himself and his will, would there not be the highest obligation on us to receive it? If it taught a guilty creature how he might be pardoned, would not that man justly remain guilty who refused its instruction? If it taught a miserable man how he might be made happy, would not any who rejected its doctrines deservedly remain miserable? If it extended its instructions beyond this life, and opened an immortality of happiness to him who embraced its conditions, would not he be justly doomed to its forfeiture who refused those conditions? Would it avail an unbeliever to say, "I cannot admit this communication to be divine. Neither its character nor its external evidence is satisfactory to my mind, and I am therefore compelled to reject its instructions?" To allow this to be a sufficient apology, is in effect to admit that God cannot supply a revelation to which he has a right to demand our faith, and for our rejec-

tion of which he has a right to punish us ; which is in fact denying that God can give us any satisfactory revelation at all. Hence therefore it follows, that a revelation might be made to man, such as no individual could reject, without rendering himself justly and awfully culpable.

A divine revelation might be made in two ways. It might be communicated to the mind of every individual, separately, and be accompanied to each, with an irresistible impression of its authority ; or it might be a written revelation, intelligible to all, to which all might appeal as a recognized and common authority. It requires little penetration to decide, that the former method would be fraught with incalculable inconveniences. Nothing, in fact, but confusion could result from it, since every man might affect to justify any mode of conduct which his appetites or interests led him to pursue, by pleading the infallible revelation of God to himself. Controversies would be endless, and no object of final appeal would be at hand. Religion and morality would become only names ; and in the midst of innumerable and contending pretenders to infallible authority, all good government would for ever be at an end. If therefore God gave a revelation, it would be of the latter kind, written, intelligible, and of universal application.

What then would be its internal character and what its evidences ? Replying in general terms, it is certain that it would, in itself, be most per-

fectly in harmony with the character and attributes of God, and adapted to the wants and welfare of man. No other communication could be worthy of a divine Author, because no other communication could answer the end for which it was designed. The infidel, of course, would require that it should be more consonant with the character of God, and more decidedly tend to the advantage of men, than the doctrines of the Bible; and that it should be accompanied by more satisfactory evidence of its authority.

To transcend the delineation of the divine character given us in the Bible, it would be necessary for such a revelation to represent it, as more than infinite in all natural and moral perfection; more fully present in every place than omnipresence;¹ more perfectly acquainted with every event than omniscience;² more complete in all duration than eternity.³ The God whom it taught us to worship, must be wiser than "the only wise,"⁴ more powerful than "the Almighty,"⁵ more just, and pure, and true, and happy, and sublime, than infinity.—

It must teach us something more, than that "God is love;"⁶ that "his tender mercies are over all his works,"⁷ that he "clothes the grass of the field,"⁸ and feeds the lions of the forest;⁹ that he

1. Ps. cxxxix. 7—10.

2. ——— 1—5, 11—16.

3. —xc. 2.

4. 1 Tim. i. 17.

5. Gen. xvii. 1.

Dan. iv. 35.

6. 1 Jno. iv. 8, 16.

7. Ps. cxlv. 9.

8. Matt. vi. 28—30.

9. Ps. civ. 21.

hears the cry of the raven,¹ and sustains the wing of the sparrow.² It must give him a tenderer character than that of a father,³ and a love infinitely surpassing the love of a mother to her sucking child.⁴ It must display him as possessing a vigilance more minute than that which watches the hairs of our head;⁵ more constant than that exerted every moment;⁶ more unwearied than that which never slumbers;⁷ more sensitive than that which keeps the apple of the eye.⁸ Above all, it must instruct us in a more perfect, powerful, and efficient beneficence than that displayed in the great gift of which the Scriptures testify,—the gift of the only begotten son of God.⁹ Unless this were its character, it would be in no wise superior to the Bible, and would not of course possess any more powerful claims on our faith and submission.

The morality too of such a revelation, must be higher and more perfect, than that of the Bible. It must inculcate a more perfect regard to the sacredness of our neighbour's property, than the commandment that binds us not to covet any thing that is our neighbour's;¹⁰—more exquisite tenderness for our neighbour's person, than that

1. Ps. cxlvii. 9.

2. Matt. x. 29.

3. Ps. ciii. 13.

4. Isa. xlix. 15.

5. Luke xii. 7.

6. Isa. xxvii. 3.

7. Ps. cxxi. 3, 4.

8. Zech. ii. 8.

9. John, iii. 16.

1. John, iv. 10.

compare John, xv. 13.
with Rom. v. 8.

10. Exod. xx. 17.

which forbids an angry thought;¹—a more immaculate chastity than that which condemns a lewd desire,² and a more powerful philanthropy, than that which holds life itself cheap for the benefit of others.³ It must more fully tend to the advantage of mankind, than the law,—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;”⁴—a law in the operation of which, our bitterest enemies and persecutors are specifically comprehended.⁵ In fine, it must urge us to better attainments than *whatsoever* things are true or venerable, just or pure, lovely or universally esteemed,—to something higher than the most perfect virtue, and the most deserved praise.⁶

It must also supply a more perfect principle of religion and morality, than that love on which the Bible so largely and frequently insists; or even if this were retained,—which would be allowing the truth of a material part of Scripture,—still the revelation in question must give it a more permanent efficiency, and employ it to a fuller extent. It must be more simple and rational in its generation, than, “we love God, because he first loved us;”⁷—more comprehensive in its operation than the spirit which occupies and impels the heart and soul, the mind and strength;⁸—more powerful in its energy, than

1. Matt. v. 22.

2. ——— 27, 28.

3. Phil. ii. 17.

1 John, iii. 16.

4. Matt. xxii. 39.

5. Matt. v. 43, 44.

6. Phil. iv. 8.

7. 1 John, iv. 19.

8. Mark, xii. 30.

that which acts at all times,¹ strengthens to all duty,² supports in all trial,³ and exhilarates in all sorrow;⁴ and more delightful in its results, than that which casts out all fear, either in respect to the affairs of this life, or the supposed retributions of another.⁵ If it fell short of this, the Bible would in this respect, possess more satisfactory evidence of its being a divine revelation.

From whatever defects the Christian Scriptures are said to possess, this supposed revelation must be entirely free. For example, it has been urged that the Bible is mysterious, and therefore not a revelation; that it is unphilosophical, and therefore not divine. The communication of which we now speak therefore, must so fully instruct us in the nature of God, as to leave us nothing to understand or inquire. It must make that which is infinite, comprehensible by a limited intellect. It must render perfectly intelligible, the eternity which is past, and explain to us how a Being is no older to-day, than he was yesterday, nor will be a thousand years hence, than he was ten thousand years ago. It must enable us to comprehend infinite space, and Him who fills it.—

It must teach us why and how God created the universe, and why neither sooner nor later than he did;—how he made man, the chymical and mechanical processes by which his body was

1. 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

2. Rom. xiii. 8—10.

3. 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

4. 1 Pet. i. 8.

5. 1 John, iv. 17, 18.

formed;—how his spiritual part was created, and how united to the material;—with what design the human race was brought into existence, and why distinguished from other animals, in figure, anatomy, and intellect. It must instruct us in the origin of evil, both natural and moral. It must explain why evil was not prevented; or why, with the prescience of it, the work of creation was effected. It must develope to us the principles of the moral conduct of the universe, classify the various orders of intelligences who inhabit it, and instruct us in the mode of government exercised by God over each. If it assume that man is sinful, it must tell us how he became so, and how he may cease to be so. In a perfectly philosophical and intelligible manner, it must illustrate how God can be just, and yet the justifier of the unrighteous. It must inform us whether man be immortal in his soul,—and in his body, and what will be the mode of his future existence. If there were occasion to allude to the laws of the natural universe, it must show what gravitation is, and what the projectile force of planets, and explain the phenomena of the atmosphere, of light, sound, &c.

In short, it must be a compendium of all science in all its parts, all truth in all its modifications, all providence in all its varieties, and all morality in all its obligations. This it must be, not merely with such accuracy of detail, and precision of phrase, that the philosophic and profound might

understand and acquiesce in all its statements, but in so small compass, and with so great simplicity, that to the poor and illiterate, to the man of business, and the man of weak intellect, each of its subjects might without considerable effort of mind, be perfectly intelligible and satisfactory. If otherwise, the objections so often raised against the Bible,—it is mysterious, and therefore not a revelation, or it is unphilosophical, and therefore not divine,—would with equal force apply to it. A book which answered this description, would need no external evidence of its divinity. It would authenticate itself. In itself, it would be the most stupendous miracle, that the mind of man ever conceived.

Some infidels, however, admit that a revelation does not necessarily preclude mystery, and that it might adopt ordinary and popular modes of expression, without rendering its character at all suspicious. They only require that it should be associated with a sufficiency of external and collateral evidence. All, however, that we know of the kind and degree of evidence which they would demand is, that it must be materially superior to that of the Bible. It must be higher than inversions of the laws of nature; more convincing, for example, than the miraculous increase of food; than the healing diseases incurable by human means; than restoring sense to the sightless eye, or the deaf ear; than the ability to speak a variety of languages without having learned them; or

than the discernment of spirits. It must be something more impressive than causing the sun and moon to stand still; than hushing the tumultuous winds to calmness; than dividing the sea, or pacifying its fiercest rage; or restoring the dead to life. It must be greater and more sublime, than the most glorious apparitions, or than even a testifying voice from heaven. It must be something more illustrative of, and more honourable to the Divine character, than the prediction of innumerable events, on a great variety of subjects, at the most remote periods, extending like a bright bond of junction, from the eternity past to the eternity to come.

It must be a more striking display of Providence, than the preservation and extension of Christianity for many ages, in spite of every effort of power, and wit, and cruelty, to overthrow it; or than its restoration, in purity and energy, from the lowest state of dejection; than its triumphs over the wisdom of the wise, the corruptions of its professed friends, the combinations of its avowed and most bitter foes, and the various forms of error successively brought against it. The evidence of which we now speak, must be something better than the elevation of individuals from the deepest profound of vice, to the highest point of moral worth; or the change of nations from barbarism, ferocity, and ignorance, to a state of civilization, urbanity, and science. It must be something more worthy of God, than the tran-

quillity of the saint, the zeal of the apostle, the constancy of the confessor, or the heroism of the martyr. These are little, mean, common, unsatisfactory things, and belong only to the vain dreams of Christianity. Such a revelation as that of which we speak, must be connected with loftier displays of divine power, wisdom, and benevolence; and among men, with higher attainments of virtue and excellence. It could not otherwise have any claims on our credence, beyond those possessed by Christianity and the Bible.

Several arguments against the divinity of the Bible, are derived from the characters of those who profess to believe in it. For example, the division of the Christian church into sects, is frequently urged as an evidence of the falsehood of Christianity. There must therefore be no variety of opinion, as to the meaning of any part of the revelation of which we now speak. It must throughout, be of so lucid a character, that all men shall be able to explain it only one way. It must not have a single equivocal phrase, nor the slightest ambiguity, real or supposed. It must be translated into all languages, and the copies of it must be multiplied with such perfect and immaculate accuracy, that none, after the most profound study, shall ever be able to interpret any sentence of it, except as it was intended to be understood; and that every individual of every nation of the earth, acting under the influence of his own private judgment, shall thus, in

every particular, arrive at precisely the same conclusion. Indeed, the infidel being judge, the very possibility of a diversity of opinion, will of itself be sufficient for its satisfactory confutation.

Every one knows how delightful a thing it is to the mind of an infidel, to expatiate on the infirmities, and faults, and sins of professing Christians; and when he has succeeded in collecting a catalogue of such delinquencies, how calmly does his benignant philosophy smile at the decisive contradiction which they give to the authority of the Scriptures! The revelation in question, must of course be authenticated by the perfect consistency of all its disciples. If it teach a morality higher than that of the Bible,—and this, as has been shown, it must do to render it worthy of credence and submission,—all who receive it must be more severely virtuous, more devotedly pious, more perfectly given up to the divine will than is required by Christianity. All who believe in it, must at once attain the summit of moral perfection; or their faith would be vain, since, according to the canonical logic of infidelity, any falling short of this character, must be admitted as fatal to the authority of the system itself.

Even from this cursory and partial survey of the subject, it certainly is not too much to say, that there could not possibly be such a revelation, or any revelation accompanied by such evidences. It necessarily follows, therefore, that the Bible

possesses moral evidence of its divine authority, as convincing as the nature of the case will admit. What more does the unbeliever wish; nay what more can he demand?

But if the Bible be a revelation from God, why does he not irresistibly convince all men that it is so? why permit this perpetual controversy? why suffer his word in any instance to be dishonoured by unbelief? The answer readily suggests itself: God treats men as moral, and of consequence, responsible creatures; and where coercion begins, moral agency ends. If it consisted with God's moral government to compel our belief, without our will, or against our will, He might also compel our practice; and indeed this would be far the preferable mode. A revelation would thus be rendered entirely needless: all the moral evils which now afflict society would disappear, and mankind at large would only do that which God immediately decreed. But were this the case, man would lose his distinctive character, and become a machine. He would no longer be the subject of virtue or vice, of praise or blame, any more than a tree for the shaking of its branches, "when they are fretted by the gusts of heaven." And if he might be deprived of moral liberty, why did he ever possess it? It was obviously an unnecessary and hurtful endowment. As therefore God cannot, consistently with the constitution of our nature, and with the rights of his own government, destroy our power of volition in matters of practice, so neither can he in matters of faith.

To put the argument in a still stronger form; man's highest virtue is the submission of his mind and heart to God. The principle of this submission is faith;—faith founded on that rational and adequate testimony, which it has already been shown the Bible associates with itself. But were we compelled to believe, we should cease to be capable of offering God this most acceptable homage to his wisdom, truth, purity, power, and goodness. And if it were consistent with his government, to deprive us of the capacity to honour him in this most perfect way, He might the more readily withdraw from us the power to choose a virtuous life; since as far as the understanding and will transcend mere physical power, so far does faith, as just explained excel mere external correctness of conduct. To require God, therefore, to give proof of the authority of the Bible, which no man could possibly resist, is to require what is much more inconsistent with the dignity of his government, than the coercion even of the practice of his rational creatures. Hence, the evidences of the Bible are not such as to compel the credence of those who possess a moral indisposition to receive them.

But still it may be urged, if God really designs us to receive the Bible as his word, why does he not accumulate its evidences? why, for instance, does he not multiply miracles, so that each individual, independantly of all others, might, for himself, have the most perfect moral assurance?

We answer, because the value of miracles, as evidences of inspiration, or rather as inducements to faith, depends upon the rarity of their occurrence. In the case proposed, every man, of every nation and of every age, must himself witness a miracle; and if this did not actually destroy the evidence derived from such events, it certainly would materially weaken its influence. What we now deem miraculous, would, in a certain sense, become a regular arrangement, and so lose its distinguishing character; or at least, as every one must be aware, with the frequency of such occurrences, their impressiveness would gradually cease, and ultimately, a real inversion of the order of nature, would scarcely affect us more than a severe thunder storm.

He too must be very ignorant of human nature, who supposes that any weight of evidence can maintain its power against the unbelief of the heart. So far does our faith depend upon the state of our affections, that "it is credible that were there any interest of life, any concernment of appetite and passion, against the truth even of geometrical theorems, (as of a triangle having its three angles equal to two right angles) whereby men's judgments might be clouded and bribed, notwithstanding all demonstration of them, many would remain at least sceptical about them."¹ And where there is a moral repugnance to the instructions of the Bible, miracles would certainly fail to overcome it.

One of the most splendid miracles of Christ was the resurrection of Lazarus ;—a miracle, the history of which, is impressive, not only from its exhibition of glorious power, but from its development of the most touching sympathy and affection. It offered to the Jewish rulers the most admirable apology for yielding up their unbelief, without any dishonour to themselves. None could have thought meanly of them, had they, upon receiving information of this miracle, admitted that Jesus was the Christ. All their preceding opposition to his claims would have appeared only a praise-worthy caution, and their ingenuousness in allowing their error, would have raised them in the estimation of every candid mind. Or had they evinced any incredulity as to the fact of the resurrection of Lazarus, and instituted an inquiry into the subject ; or had they questioned whether the power by which it was effected was really divine, there might have been some show of reason in their continued rejection of the mission of him who wrought it. Nothing of this kind, however, appears in the history. Their minds were neither intimidated nor softened. They were not to “be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”¹ Their malignity was exacerbated to the highest degree, and they deliberately sat down to arrange means for the murder of Jesus.² As also, while Lazarus lived, there would remain the most surprising

1. Luke, xvi. 31.—2. John, xi. 46—53.

evidence of the love and power of the Saviour,—that they might not leave their work incomplete, they determined, if possible, to put him to death likewise.¹

The Jewish rulers never denied the resurrection of Jesus. The first miracle wrought by the apostles, in proof, and by the power of that event, was the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. This they admitted to have taken place. The evidence of the divine mission of Jesus, was thus accumulated before their eyes, and they surely must have had as ample testimony as the most fastidious could desire. But as the proof increased, so did their obduracy of heart, and their determination not to receive it; and its only effect was a more decided hostility against the apostles, and a greater effort to put a stop to their teaching.² So erroneous is the notion, that he who witnesses a miracle, necessarily believes the truth of the doctrine for the attestation of which such an event takes place. Human nature is in all ages the same; and on hearts morally indisposed to the reception of Christianity, a miracle in our own times, would be as powerless as in the case of the Jewish rulers.

The Bible declares, that every man who comes to the inquiry into its authority, with a sincere desire to do the will of God, shall receive every necessary assurance on the subject.—“If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know of the

1. John xii. 10, 11.—2. Acts, iv. 5—22.

doctrine whether it be of God."¹ This condition is certainly reasonable ; indeed to any but those whom it describes, conviction on the subject is of little consequence. What importance is it to a man, to know whether the Bible be a divine revelation, except so far as he is willing to submit his heart and life to its instructions ? He who will not do this, however fully he may affect to be convinced of its authority, remains a practical infidel. Any other condition prefixed to a revelation, would dishonour its Author. It would be a permission to arrogant and rebellious minds to place themselves in the seat of judgment, before they had learned the attitude of submission. It would be doing honour to men, who refuse to do homage to God. He too who will not render the worship of his heart to his Creator, is not in a state of moral fitness to inquire into divine truth. There is such a distortion and obliquity of his powers, that he is sure to fall into error. Happy will it be, if that error do not prove fatal and irretrievable. Nothing indeed, to the mind of the Christian, can be more illustrative of God's mercy, than his saving so many polluted minds from those capital mistakes to which they are continually liable.

But while, on the one hand, no man who is unwilling to do God's will, has a right to expect a clear discernment of the truth of the Bible, we need not hesitate to affirm, on the other, that no one ever approaches it with a humble mind, who

1. John, vii. 17.

is not, sooner or later, satisfied of its authority. He who comes to the inquiry, sensible of his own wants and weaknesses, his folly and depravity, and deeply impressed with the greatness and majesty of God, will find in the Scriptures so much exactly adapted to his condition, both in the way of description and instruction, and so much which tends to exalt his views of the divine character, and especially of the divine goodness, that he will ultimately be disburdened of all doubts, and will joyfully acquiesce in their authority and claims. Rather than that such an one should remain in uncertainty, God would multiply miracles a thousand fold. But it is not needful. The evidence by which the Bible is authenticated, never yet, in one instance, failed to satisfy the mind of the humble seeker after truth.

"I can conceive," says Cecil, "a character much more pernicious in its influence than the daring and impudent infidel. A man in the estimation of all the world, modest, amiable, benevolent, who should with deep concern lament the obligation under which he feels himself, to depart from the religion of Europe, the religion of his country, the religion of his family; and should profess his unfeigned desire to find this religion true, but that he cannot possibly bring his mind to believe it, and that for such and such reasons:—when he should thus introduce all the strongest points that can be urged on the subject. But God governs the world. It is not in his design

to permit such men to arise. The infidel has always had something about him which has ascertained his obliquity to the eye that has not been dimmed by the moral indisposition of the heart."¹

The unbeliever complains that the evidence of Christianity is not sufficient for him. This we readily admit. It is not, it cannot be sufficient, till he learns a degree of humility and of approbation of the divine will. These, as he well knows, he does not possess. Nothing can be more absurd than the expectation, nothing more indecent than the demand, that without them he should be convinced of the authority of the Bible. He is utterly destitute of the moral qualification necessary for the discernment of the force of the evidence by which it is substantiated,—qualification rendered indispensable by the nature of things, as well as by a specific decree of God. It is not enough that the course of nature be changed, so long as his dispositions remain the same. The purity of Scripture morals is insufficient, so long as his affections and appetites rise in rebellion against them. With the sufferings of holy men for their faith, he has no sympathy. The revelation of future events does not affect him, while the condition of his own heart remains unrevealed. The absurdities resulting from his rejection of Christianity, he cannot discern, while he remains blind to the still greater absurdity of

1. Remains, pp. 150, 151. Ed. 1821.

which he is guilty, in attempting to dictate to his Creator and Judge. He speaks the truth when he says, that the evidence of Christianity is insufficient for him. Were it ten fold stronger than it is, it would still be inadequate to his conviction, so long as he comes to the Bible as a sceptic, and not as an inquirer, as a teacher, and not as a disciple.

Does he still ask for miracles? They present themselves on every hand. He must shut his eyes not to see them. Multitudes of habitual drunkards have suddenly become sober;—the debauched have learned strange chastity;—the praises of God and Christ fill the mouths of blasphemers;—patience and courteousness distinguish the once ferocious;—the ambitious have learned to bear shame and reproach,—and in short, innumerable moral revolutions, infinitely surpassing the highest powers of nature have been wrought by Christianity. These living arguments of our faith may be sneered at, but they cannot be paralleled. Let the infidel philosopher make his experiment, for example, on an habitual drunkard. Let him take Epictetus in one hand, and Bolingbroke in the other. Let him enhance the weight of their morals, by the sense of shame, and the desire of reputation. Let him still farther try the influence of parental and conjugal love, and when all fail, let him admit, that the power which changes such an one, must be far beyond the devices of human wit, or the maxims

of human morality. It is enough. Christianity has transformed countless multitudes of men, equally degraded and brutalized,—men far beyond all influence of moral persuasion except its own, who are at this day living witnesses of its virtue. These are its proudest trophies, and its brightest evidences. It has achieved, it does achieve that for which it was intended. These are its “letters of commendation,—known and read of all men;—written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.”¹ These form a succession of miracles, to each of which, giving life to the dead is comparatively a small matter. Were there no other proof of the divine authority of the Bible, these, to the mind of the thoughtful and modest inquirer, would be sufficient indication of the hand of God.

Our conclusions from the whole therefore are,—

I. Man is accountable for his belief.

II. God might give a revelation of his character and will, which none could reject without sinning against the rights of reason, and rebelling against the authority of its Author.

III. No revelation could be associated with stronger moral evidence than the Bible.

IV. The rejection of the Bible necessarily involves the grossest absurdities, therefore

V. *The Bible is a divinely inspired revelation ; and no man can disbelieve it, without forfeiting*

1. 2 Cor. iii. 1—3.

his character as a rational being, and coming under the just judgment of an insulted God.

Suppose however, that we were unsuccessful in proving, either the folly of infidelity, or the truth of Christianity. Suppose that the infidel had as much of the argument on his part as we on ours : nay, suppose that the probabilities were in his favour,—still, since Christianity *may* be true, we need not hesitate to affirm, that no Christian is justified in abandoning his faith. In whichever way the controversy terminates, HE is secure. If he is right, he is the heir of the highest happiness for ever and ever. If he be wrong, still his condition is preferable to that of the unbeliever. He manages to cheat away the dreariness of life, by the power of a delightful hope, which, to himself at least, appears well founded. He is a useful member of society, and partakes all the real blessings of this world, with a temperance and gratitude, which enhance their enjoyment. He is not disquieted by the apprehension of death, and when it comes, if there be no hereafter, he will not be sensible of the disappointment. He will moulder in the grave as quietly as the unbeliever, and his name will be associated with a reputation not less virtuous, and recollections not less tender.

One of the most eminent spirits of antiquity, was so enraptured with the glimpses of immortality, which he had gained from very inferior sources of information, that, far from submitting to the cold suggestions of the sceptics of that age, he expresses his steady resolution, at all risks, to retain his faith upon this subject. "If," says he, "I err, in believing the soul of man to be immortal, I am willing to err; nor will I suffer this error to be wrested from me so long as I live."¹ And have not we far stronger reason for the same determination, in respect to Christianity? His was mere conjecture; we have all the evidence we can rationally desire. His attachment was to a speculation; the great recommendation of the object of our interest, is, that it is a grand practical system. And whether our religion be speculatively true or not, we know and feel that it is practically the highest good of which we are capable. If indeed it be a delusion, it is no friendly hand that would destroy it, and give us instead, the cold, hard, chilling, naked reality of hopelessness, depravity, and annihilation. We will not listen to those who would rob us of it, however plausible their professions. He that would infuse doubt into my heart, is an enemy to my peace. He cannot but do me injury: he cannot intend to do me service, unless he is blind to all the

1. "Quod si in hoc erro, quod animum hominis immortalem esse credam, libenter erro; nec ego hunc errorem, dum vivo, extorquere volo." CICERO.

happiness which I derive from Christianity, and if he is, he is utterly unfit for my adviser. At all events, I will determinately shut my ears against his insinuations, and cherish in my heart the most settled abhorrence of his example.

The whole of his character indeed, justifies our rejection of his counsel. The maxims by which he governs himself, the general conduct of his life, his inveterate persecution of Christian principles, the extreme scorn with which he treats the professors of Christianity, with many other equally obvious indications, prove, beyond a doubt, not merely that he *disbelieves*, but primarily, that he *HATES* the religion which is to us, beyond comparison, dear and venerable. Yet nothing can be more irrational. If Christianity be the feeble thing which he represents it, why does he not suffer it to moulder away from its own weakness, without the mighty efforts which he directs to its destruction? If it be a mischievous system, how does it happen, that we, who are best acquainted with its working, have never yet discovered its pernicious character? If it be false, to him at least it can do no injury, for its *truth* is the only thing he has to dread. And what can at all account for his deadly hostility to it, but the apprehension that, spite of all his arguments, his ridicule, his libertinism, Christianity may be true.

Yes; Christianity *may* be true, and the period will soon arrive, when all doubt and controversy

on the subject will for ever cease. The unbeliever ventures a desperate experiment. Its full results will shortly appear ; and if he is wrong, his error will then be irreparable. How tremendous his risk ! If the Bible is the book of God, and if Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, and if the gospel is the only way of salvation, how terrible will be the destiny of the avowed foe of Christianity, in the day of final retribution ! He has defied the power of the Almighty. He has dared the indignation of that glorious Being who created the universe. He has blasphemed that God, whose lightest frown could send him shivering with terror, or writhing in agony, to seek refuge in the deepest abyss of eternal darkness. He has made an obscene and drunken jest of the tears, and shame, and cross of that Saviour, who loved him even to the death. He has done despite to that Almighty Spirit, who would fain have renovated his heart, and effected in him the highest possible moral elevation. He has scorned and cursed the people, of whom God has avowed himself the friend. He has ridiculed the zeal of the apostles ; and the torments of the martyrs have been to him matter of ribald mirth. He can no longer keep his eyes closed against the truth. The Saviour whom he has dishonoured, becomes his inexorable Judge. He has cut himself off from all hope. "There remaineth no more a sacrifice for sin," and Justice, which has long slumbered, now awakes, to

pour out everlasting horror upon the wretched rebel against the long suffering and patience of God.

And what is the mighty good, for which all this terrible peril is encountered? ¹ What is the moral dignity to which infidelity impels us to aspire, and what the secular honours which it offers to our exertions? What are the blessed hopes which it supplies from futurity, and what the substantial joys which it imparts to us now? What grand intellectual effort does it call forth, and to what pleasing sensibilities does it give birth or employment? Many there are whom it has covered with infamy, but where is the individual whose virtuous reputation it has ever promoted? Many there are whom it has reduced to poverty, but where is the instance in which it has been the giver of wealth? Many there are whom it has rendered wretched, but where is the heart or the home that it has made happy? Nothing can be more chilling than its philosophy, ² nothing more degrading than its morals. Its highest wisdom is DOUBT; ³ its most exalted virtue SELFISHNESS. ⁴ It teaches us to question whether

1. See ch. ii.

2. See Hume's Treatise of human nature. Vol. i. p. 469.

3. Ibid. Vol. i. pp. 3, 4, 468, 469.

4. "All wisdom, all perfection, all virtue, all philosophy consist in the practice of the following maxims, which are founded upon our natural organization.

REVERENCE THYSELF.

INSTRUCT THYSELF.

the fire burns or the water refreshes.⁵ It places annihilation before us as a fitting object for the ambition of sentient and intellectual man. It has no Providence to guard, no Saviour to redeem, no immortality to ennoble. It stirs no sympathy, inflames no genius, and begets no hope. It has nothing to excite our joys, and nothing to assuage our grief. No angry passion owns its soothing power; no intellectual perplexity hails its welcome direction; no anxious apprehension admits its comforting influence. Its congenial elements are scorn and debauchery, or apathy and confusion.

What then is its recommendation? Where are

MODERATE THYSELF.

Live for thy fellow creatures, in order that they may live for thee." VOLNEY.

How fair are the instructions of our despised Christianity, when contrasted with the sordid spirit of infidel philosophy! Take but two examples.

"None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." PAUL.

"If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." JESUS CHRIST.

5. Treatise of Human Nature. Vol. i. p. 465.

its attractions? How has it succeeded in winning the interest and securing the advocacy of so considerable a multitude? Either because it inflames the pride of conceited minds, or dulls the moral sense, or affords to insolent spirits a vent for their impertinent flippancy. And is this all? Positively the whole. One class of sceptics are content to endure all the calamities which the Bible threatens, if they can only secure them by the operation of their own theories. Could any invention of theirs, ensure to them the enjoyments promised only to the humble and docile, they would condescend to accept them. But rather than allow their Creator any part in making them happy, they are resolved to risk the endurance of eternal and unspeakable sorrow. There are other unbelievers, who do not hesitate to expose themselves to the most horrible evil, provided they can succeed for a few years in silencing the voice of conscience; like the silly bird of the desert, they conceal their heads, and because they discern no danger, strive to convince themselves that they are secure. A third set of infidels will have nothing to do with Christianity, because by an attachment to it, they would infallibly lose caste among an order of persons as frivolous as themselves. Religion, with them, is purely a matter of fashion. Reflection is too serious a burden for their effeminate minds; and the suspicion of any thing like a community of

credence and feeling with the vulgar, is in their esteem, an evil far more momentous than the never-dying worm, and the unquenchable fire. Strange infatuation! Talk of the absurdity of our faith! The most wild exposition of Scripture, ever suggested by the maddest of fanatics, is rational compared to the phrenzy of infidelity. What sane man with a human heart, can behold its extravagance, without the deepest commiseration? But alas, its unhappy victims are beyond the exertions of the pity of man! Tears of blood would avail nothing for their recovery. How should they indeed, when the most heroic sacrifice of which the human mind ever conceived, has failed to affect their hearts? Yet are they not utterly beyond the limit of God's mercy, and of the moral renovation which he is able to effect. Let all Christians therefore, in earnest intercession specially commend to his compassion the unhappy men, who have hitherto dishonoured his holy word. And while they thus imitate the benevolence of their blessed Master, let them not forget the great moral lesson, which the miserable and perilous state of the infidel so forcibly suggests:—"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF, in departing from the living God!"¹

1. Heb. iii. 12.

FINIS.

